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LITTLE BUFFALO BILL;

Or, THE BOY SCOUT OF THE RIO DEL NORTE.

By LIEUT. E. H. KELLOGG.



"Gents," continued Little Buffalo Bill, turning to the assembled hunters, "You have heard the evidence of this cringing wretch; he has admitted that he meant to kill me; what is your will?" "Death!" The words struck consternation to the miserable craven and he sank upon his knees.

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LITTLE BUFFALO BILL;

OR,

The Boy Scout of the Rio Del Norte.

By LIEUT. E. H. KELLOGG,

Author of "Green Mountain Joe, the Old Trapper of Malbro Pond," "Billy Button," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE TARGET SHOOT.

CRACK! crack!

The sharp report of two rifles rang out almost simultaneously, reverberating again and again from the peaked crags and towering cliffs bordering the Rio Del Norte river; and the sounds were followed by the loud huzzas of two hunters who were riding down the declivity of the range.

The hunters were dressed in the usual hunting costume, and were tall and athletically built.

They were mounted on superb specimens of horseflesh, and armed.

As the shouts and shots reached a group of men gathered around the ranch at the base of the mountains, they turned and looked up at the approaching hunters, and responded to the cheers with a hearty three times three.

"By Jingo, boys!" shouted one of the group, tossing up his hat and riddling it with a bullet from his rifle, "if it ain't Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack, sure as catamounts."

"So it is," retorted another, following suit. Which remarks were accompanied by a perfect salvo of rifle shots.

Meanwhile the two hunters came tearing down the slope like centaurs, and reaching the open plateau at the foot, reined in their smoking steeds at the door of the ranch, where they sprang from their saddles, turning the beasts over to the hostler.

"A hearty welcome to you, gentlemen," said the landlord of the inn, a wiry, lank specimen of a New Englander, who having heard the shooting and accompanying cheers, hastened to the door to meet his new guests; "it's a cure for sore eyes to see you again, it's so long since you've been here!"

"If that's the case, Jason," said Buffalo Bill, who had been busily shaking hands with the crowd, "you'd better set up an eye-opener, for my peepers are chock full of dust, and my throat's as dry as the great salt canyon after a forty days' drought!"

"All right, Mr. Cody," smiled the landlord, rubbing his hands with satisfaction, "it's all ready for you, just as ready as you are with your jokes; but which way do you hail from?"

"We've just come from Fort Cummings," replied the great scout, "and the red devils are out in force; but come in, boys, and try something, for I haven't more'n two hours to spare to drink and feed, and I've got to do it up lively."

Another cheer greeted the invitation, and all hands went into the bar-room.

"Which way ar' they comin', Bill?" asked Jethro Baxter, the hunter, who had been the first to notify the rest of the approach of the two scouts.

"Due west from the reservation, Jeth," answered Buffalo Bill, as the landlord set out drinks for the crowd. "It's reported that they are more'n two hundred and fifty strong, and in full paint and plumage. Captain Hyde sent me and Jack down to Fort Franklin for assistance, as he's short-handed. I'd be off now if it wasn't that the horses are done up, and want rest and fodder."

"I can accommodate you with horses, gents," said Jason Hendrickson, the landlord,

"but I wish you could wait and see the shootin'."

"Goin' to have a shoot, hey?" said Bill. "I reckon we'll have to take it in, even if it does take double riding; won't we, Jack?"

"Yes," replied Bill's companion, who was more noted for his sharp shots and hard hits than for his keen wit and sharp tongue.

"That's a go," said Hendrickson. "If you chaps stand in the boys'll want something to steady their nerves. Come up, gents, it's my turn."

All hands proving agreeable, the jig-water was set up again.

Just then a loud halloo was heard outside the building, and every one ran to the door to ascertain the cause.

A young man of seventeen, or thereabouts, had just dismounted and handed his horse, which was a thoroughbred, to the hostler.

He was a tall, well-developed youth of his age with swelling chest, narrow waist, and broad hips, that denoted great strength and supple movement.

His well-formed limbs were displayed to perfection by his tight-fitting hunting suit, and his wolfskin cap sat jauntily upon a well-shaped head covered with close, curling hair of raven blackness.

Beneath his broad, open brow flashed a pair of sparkling eyes, that were keen and piercing as an eagle's, and his handsome mouth and chin lent a strange beauty to his shapely features.

In his hand was a hunting rifle, and in his belt rested a brace of revolvers and a horn handled bowie-knife.

"Bill Martine, by all that's holy!" ejaculated Jethro Buxter. "By golly, boy, I'm glad to see ye!"

"So am I, California," replied the boy. "Give us a tip at your fives."

The next moment they were shaking hands like fast friends.

"What brought ye down here, boy?" demanded the old hunter, as soon as he could release his hand from the stanch grip.

"I just took it into my head to come down to the shoot and carry off the prize," replied the boy, nonchalantly, "and I mean to do it!"

"Well, you'll have ter do yer puttiest then," replied Baxter, "for you've got Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack to try yer mettle!"

"The blazes you say! Well, I can't help it, but I'll try my best, see if I don't. I just had a chance to keep in my hand, and I won the prize."

The boy held up a scalp-lock dripping with gore, and shook it in the faces of the admiring hunters.

"Apache, by gum!" ejaculated Baxter; "where did ye strike him?"

"Plum center in the forehead," laughed the boy, "and he dropped quicker than chain lightning. He meant bad, for he was out on the warpath, but he'll never go back to report to his tribe, bet your life."

A hearty cheer greeted the boy's remark as all gathered around shaking him warmly by the hand.

"Which way did you come?" demanded Buffalo Bill.

"Down the mountains."

"It's darned queer I didn't see anything of the red skunk."

"Maybe you didn't have your eyes skinned."

A laugh greeted the reply, and the scout looked somewhat riled.

"Don't be too fresh, young fellow," said he, sharply, "or maybe I'll take you in hand."

"I wish you would; you couldn't suit me better."

"Wagh!" growled Bill, turning away.

"Don't get mad," said the boy, dashing forward and catching the scout's hand; "I was only in fun, and meant no harm; you done me a good turn once, and I never forget a favor."

CHAPTER II.

BILL MARTINE'S CRACK SHOT.

BUFFALO BILL turned toward the boy with manifest surprise.

"I don't remember anything about it, young fellow," said he, "but don't be so free with your tongue, and I'll forgive you."

The boy looked earnestly at Buffalo Bill as he stalked away, apparently undecided whether to follow and explain matters, or let things rest as they were, but finally took the latter course, as Jason announced that the shooting was to commence.

The rifle-range was excellently chosen, being situated on an open plateau, some mile in extent, and possibly half as wide.

The targets were at half distance, say half a mile off, and the judges' stand was protected by a huge boulder just to the left of the targets.

By this time there were some forty hunters ready to contest for the various prizes, and nearly twice as many to witness the match.

The first four matches were easily disposed of without attracting any particular attention, as none of the crack shots took a hand in them, and then came the fancy shooting.

A light willow twig, barely as large as a man's little finger, was set upright in the ground where the targets had stood, and the contestants took their places.

The mark was so small that it scarcely presented the appearance of a hair, and the first four that fired each missed in turn.

Then Texas Jack took position.

Looking carefully to the priming of his piece, he drew it to his shoulder and fired. As the puff of smoke darted from the muzzle of his rifle, the pliant twig fluttered and fell over, cleft half in twain.

A shout of applause greeted the feat as the scout gave place to Buffalo Bill.

Lifting his rifle and looking carefully along the sight, Buffalo Bill drew trigger.

Crack!

Away flew the trusty bullet, and in a second the severed twig tottered to the earth.

"By golly, that can't be beat!" said one of the by-standers, as another round greeted the feat.

Turning toward him, our hero saw that he was a rough looking fellow, with as evil a cast of countenance as ever he had set eyes on.

Bill Martine took a good look at him, but never remembered to have seen him before.

"Do you think so?" inquired he, carelessly.

"Certain!" replied the man, returning his gaze for an instant, and then dropping his eyes to the earth.

"We shall see," said the young hunter. "Hendrickson, I'll try my luck."

"It ain't no use, Billy," replied the landlord, "you may as well pull out."

"Nary a time; put up another twig."

Going to the pile of osiers, he selected one somewhat smaller than the former, and twisted it into a true lovers' knot.

This he fastened to another twig, and setting it in the ground, returned to the stand.

For an instant he stood regarding it keenly with his glittering eyes, then elevated his rifle and fired.

A perfect furore of applause greeted the shot.

The knot was cleft exactly in the center, and remained oscillating on the twig without parting another shred.

"By the living Jingo!" ejaculated Buffalo Bill, clapping his hand on his thigh with a report like a pistol shot, "that beats the deck. Who are you, boy? I don't believe I could do that myself."

"My name's William Martine," replied the boy, flushing with pride at the praise of the great hunter.

"Martine, Martine," said Buffalo Bill, scratching his ear thoughtfully; "'pears to me I've heard that name before?"

"You have, and you ought to remember it," replied the boy, "for you saved the life of my parents and myself."

"Oh!"

"Yes," said Young Martine, warmly; "don't you remember the August afternoon ten years ago, when the ruthless Apaches attacked an emigrant wagon-train, some fifteen miles from this very spot?"

"Can't say that I exactly do," answered Buffalo Bill. "I've seen so many trains attacked that I can't recall any particular one at a moment's notice."

"Well, I do," responded the boy, "and I'll never forget it to the longest day I live. I was only seven years old then, and father had just camped for the night. The sun was just setting like a great ball of fire, and I was watching it while mother was getting supper ready. Suddenly I heard a volley of shots, followed by demoniac yells that caused my heart to jump as I ran to my mother, screaming with terror. Then I saw a band of painted savages riding down upon us, shouting and yelling like a legion of fiends as they brandished their tomahawks and scalping-knives around their heads. As they approached nearer the men sprang to arms, and the women darted to the corraled wagons. Shot after shot rained around us with deadly effect. The men began to fall like slaughtered sheep as they attempted to return the murderous fire; but all seemed useless, as the shrieking savages swooped down like ravenous wolves, to rend us piecemeal. But the fight was of but short duration; mortal strength seemed futile against such fearful odds. One by one our defenders fell, and the few remaining gathered hopelessly around their shrieking wives and children. On came the painted devils. Already they were pouring over the slight impediment that kept them off, when suddenly a volley of musketry was heard, and a company of mounted hunters rode into their midst. Shot followed shot in rapid succession; a perfect pandemonium of shouts and yells ensued, and when I recovered my scattered senses we were safe. It was you, Mr. Cody, that saved our lives, and my mother has prayed nightly ever since that God will bless you for it."

As the boy ceased speaking the bronze-featured scout turned away and wiped the moisture from his eyes.

"There," said he, huskily, "pray don't mention it. I simply did my duty as every honest man should, and that's all there is about it."

"Don't you remember me now?" asked young Martine, eagerly.

"I think I do," replied the scout; "at least I remember the circumstance; but how are your father and mother?"

"Ah!" said the boy with a sigh, "poor mother is dead a year, but father is up to the ranch with sister."

"Yes, I remember her," said Buffalo Bill; "she was a lovely little thing of nine, with bright golden curls."

"Yes," replied young Martine, "and she's nineteen now, and as curly-headed as ever. You must come and see us."

"I will."

"You ought to have come before. I have often heard of your brave deeds, and longed

to see you. Now that I've found you, I don't mean to let you off easy."

"You needn't; you may depend upon my dropping in promiscuous."

Just then the host announced that dinner was waiting, and the match ceased for the present.

CHAPTER III.

LITTLE BUFFALO BILL'S CHRISTENING.

It was a regular old-time spread to which the hunters sat down; mountain trout, buffalo haunch, venison steak, game pasties and wild grape pies were set off with California wine and excellent brandy, followed up with steaming coffee, to which all did ample justice and adjourned to the bar.

Here several games of chance were in full blast, and found numerous players.

At one of these, a three-card monte deck, young Martine took his stand to watch the progress of the game.

It was being run by the man that he had met at the rifle range.

For a time everything progressed at an even rate, and men lost and won as chances served.

But suddenly the boy sprang forward.

"Hold up, gents!" shouted he, with flashing eyes. "There's cheating going on here. That man's a fraud."

"What d'ye mean?" demanded the man, with a wicked light in his eyes.

"Just what I said," retorted young Martine, with an equally defiant glance. "Search him, you'll find another card up his sleeve."

A scene of the wildest confusion greeted the announcement. Angry men pressed eagerly toward the monte player, uttering savage oaths.

"Stand back!" shouted he, gathering up the cards and placing them in his pocket; "give me a chance. I assure you that I play an honest game."

"Let's see the cards!" shouted several in a breath.

"There they are," retorted he, dashing them on the table; "but as for this young whipper-snapper, I'll teach him a lesson that he won't forget in a hurry."

He darted toward his accuser as he spoke, but several leaped between them.

"Shame, shame!" shouted they; "he's only a boy."

"The more reason for him to guard his tongue!"

"Stand back, gents," said young Martine, with flashing eyes and swelling chest; "this is my racket, and I can defend myself. I have made the charge and will abide by it; all that I want is fair play!"

"And you shall have it," cried Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack in a breath; "come outside and let 'em have it out."

In a moment all hands had crowded from the bar-room and formed a ring upon the grass before the ranch.

The next instant the two closed with set teeth and panting breath.

The gambler thought to have demolished his youthful opponent by sheer strength, but found himself at fault, for, as he made a desperate grasp at the boy, the latter writhed aside like a snake, striking him a stunning blow between the eyes.

The man staggered from the assault, but, pulling himself together, retaliated with a cross-counter.

But young Martine leaped nimbly back, and planting two quick strokes with his right and left, sent his adversary to grass with the blood pouring in torrents from both nostrils.

A loud huzza greeted the blows as the gambler staggered up and made blindly for young Martine.

This time he got in one blow which caused the white flesh to bulge and turn blue, but the next instant the brave boy shook his head, and planting two stingers upon the eyes of the gambler, felled him like an ox, where he lay stunned and bleeding.

"Kill him!"

"Hang the scamp!" shouted a number, bursting into the ring.

"No!" shouted the winner, leaping in front of the prostrate man with a revolver in either hand; "back, back, I say! He's got enough; let the miserable skunk go. I'll warrant he won't trouble any of us in a hurry!"

"That's so, boys; that's so," said Buffalo Bill; "the young fellow's polished him off like a brick, and shall have his way!"

"Fact!" put in Texas Jack; "and I'll see

him out in it. Come, let's drink to the health of the young fellow; it's my put up!"

A loud cheer greeted the invitation, and, lifting young Martine on their shoulders, the crowd bore him triumphantly into the bar-room, leaving the crest-fallen gambler to recover and sneak away as best he could, which he did, muttering low and smothered curses, as he vowed dire threats of vengeance in the future.

Meanwhile the hunters had reached the bar-room, where they placed the boy hero up on the counter, calling for a speech.

"Comrades and friends," said he, with flushed face and sparkling eyes, "I ain't much on the speech, and, if I was, I couldn't say anything just now, for my heart is too full for expression; but allow me to assure you that this unexpected and unmerited display of kindness on your part is duly appreciated and amply cherished. I can say no more than to thank you a thousand times."

"Hear, hear, hear!" shouted the crowd, and then fell to the disposing of the drinks set up by Texas Jack.

"By Jingo!" said Buffalo Bill, wringing the boy's hand until he winced, "you are just a rip-roarer, and no mistake. You did up that miserable skunk the prettiest I ever see. I'm proud of you, 'deed I am; almost as proud of you as if I was your proper father; and he'll be prouder than I am when I tell him all about it, 'deed he will."

"There, that'll do," said the boy. "Let up light on me—you make me blush worse than a girl."

"There ain't no gal about you. I wish there was, for I'm half in love with you as it is. By Ginger!" ejaculated he, the next instant, "ain't I half-father as it is? Didn't you allow some hours ago that I saved your life?"

"Certain, and I'll stick to it!"

"So you shall. I'll adopt you. Say, boys, I'm going to christen this kid anew. What do you say to it?"

Loud shouts greeted the proposal as Buffalo Bill called for a bottle of champagne. When the bottle was set up Bill seized it by the neck before it was opened, and leaping on the counter beside the astonished boy, before he could comprehend his intentions, snapped off the neck with the butt of his revolver, showering the contents over his head.

"William Martine!" shouted he, in a half sportive mood, "I adopt you as my own, barring your natural parent, and rechristen you as Little Buffalo Bill. God bless you!"

And as the loud shouts of the crowd rang through the bar-room, the genial scout clasped the surprised boy to his breast, hugging him like a bear.

CHAPTER IV.

ON A BUFFALO'S BACK.

SCARCELY had the hubbub following the scout's impromptu christening ceased before a man, booted and spurred and covered with mud, dashed into the bar-room.

"To arms!" shouted he. "The Apaches have come down on the ranch of Col. Allison and killed all hands!"

"Great God!" gasped Little Buffalo Bill, turning deathly pale. "Have they killed all?"

He came so near falling from the counter that Buffalo Bill was forced to clasp him tightly to prevent him.

"No," said the man, "they have killed all except the colonel and Miss Lucy, whom they have carried off as prisoners."

"By the great Eternal!" shouted the boy, his eyes ablaze with fury, "the red devils shall pay dearly for this! I'll line my saddle-bow with scalps! Who will come with me in pursuit?"

"I will—I will!" replied at least two dozen voices at once.

"I wish that I could go, too," said Buffalo Bill; "but how about the fort?"

"I'll go down to the fort with the dispatches," replied Texas Jack, comprehending his companion's desire precisely; "and you go right along with your protegee."

"Bully for you, Jack; you're a perfect trump, and I shan't forget this of you!"

The scout grasped his comrade's hand like a vise, and running to the door, called loudly for his horse.

In an instant a scene of wild confusion ensued. All thoughts of the target-shoot fled to the winds, and armed men hastened hither and thither in search of their steeds. Loud

shouts prevailed as the hunters called eagerly to each other, and in less than ten minutes the whole party were in saddle and riding swiftly away toward the colonel's ranch.

The route that they took led over an undulating country covered with a heavy growth of timber.

For a time they were overshadowed by the dense foliage of the towering pines, but finally they came out into a clearing bordering on the waving ocean of prairie grass.

To the left stretched a low range of sand-hills covered with dwarfed pines, while a forest of heavy timber belted them on the right.

As they rode on, the lowering sun cast long shadows through the scurrying clouds upon the undulating prairie grass, in which they were bedded to the tips of their horses' ears.

Suddenly Buffalo Bill reared up in his saddle, placing his hand to his left ear to listen.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

"What?" demanded Little Buffalo Bill, who was riding at his side.

Then came a strange, wondrous sound resembling distant thunder, but not a sign of a storm appeared in the blue heavens.

"Buffaloes!" retorted Bill; "there's a whole herd of them t'other side of those sand-hills; we'll have to ride fast or they'll be upon us and ride us down."

The other hunters heard the appalling sound also, and their anxious faces told that they fully comprehended their danger. But plunging the rowels of their spurs into the haunches of their smoking steeds, they urged them to renewed speed.

On rode the gallant men as if desirous of eluding the approaching danger by flight, while louder grew the ominous roar of the approaching herd.

Already the ground began to tremble beneath the hooved tread, and presently the herd appeared in sight on the verge of the sand-hill, with the bull leader thundering in advance.

"Forward, boys!" shouted Buffalo Bill, urging his comrades lustily with his voice. "It is our only chance; the black devils will be down upon us in full force in less than a minute."

Meanwhile, the massive brutes came tearing down the slope of sand-hills, darkening the sides with their tawny coats.

A huge cloud of dust surrounded them, nearly hiding them from sight, but as they struck the prairie bottom, the vast extent of the immense herd was distinctly visible.

"Ride for your life, boy, ride for your life!" urged the scout. "Faster, faster, or they'll ride you down!"

"I can't, I can't," replied Little Buffalo Bill. "My horse has cast a shoe and is dead lame."

"Then God have mercy on you!" moaned his companion, turning ashen pale. "Quick! Leap behind me and I'll see you through."

As he spoke the brave fellow fired point blank at the nearest bull with his revolver.

But the bullet seemed simply to madden the infuriated beast to increased frenzy, for he came on swifter than before.

The boy strove to obey the order, but as he did so his horse stumbled and tossed him forward headlong.

Fortunately his feet were clear from the stirrups, or he would have been cast beneath the hoofs of the herd and trampled to pieces, but as it was, as his flight ceased he landed upon the back of a monster bull.

So sudden was the concussion that it nearly took away our hero's breath, but pulling himself together as best he could, he planted his knees firmly upon the buffalo's hump and made a grasp for his tangled mane. But before he could gain a secure hold the surprised beast, astounded at the strange rider, uttered a snort, and kicking up his heels tossed the boy ten feet in the air.

Bill thought that he must have turned at least a dozen somersaults before he landed again, which he presently did, only to repeat the dose until he was bruised and aching from the blows received.

Meanwhile, the ferocious herd was tearing on at its wildest pace, while poor Bill strove to keep his position as well as possible, to prevent his being tossed beneath the feet of the infuriated beasts and trampled to pieces by their hoofs.

It was a startling, a terrific situation, one to appall the stoutest heart, but Bill as he descended made another grasp for the brute's mane, and had scarcely steadied himself into position before he heard the sharp report of a

rifle behind him. Turning his head, he saw the gambler with whom he had had the fight at the ranch riding another buffalo with his rifle elevated to fire again.

CHAPTER V.

A DUEL WITH KNIVES ON BUFFALO BACK.

It was a startling, a desperate moment for Little Buffalo Bill.

He had scarcely attained a position upon the hump of one of the ponderous bulls, where he could sustain himself from being hurled beneath the feet of the infuriated herd, before he heard the warning click of the desperado's rifle, accompanied by the singing of the bullet as it sped by his head following the report of the piece.

"By the living jingo!" thought he to himself, as the cold perspiration poured down his forehead and he saw the desperate wretch preparing to fire again, "what can I do? It would be certain death to let go my hold of the mane; but it's got to be done, or I'll be riddled tighter than a sieve!"

Then, letting go his right hand, he felt for his pistols.

"Great Jinks!" moaned he, as he discovered that they were missing; "I left them in the holsters; what a cursed fool I was! Hal!"

He remembered that his trusty rifle was swung upon his shoulders, for he could feel it dangling against his back.

Crack!

Another bullet whizzed in close proximity to our hero's head, but fortunately a lurch of the buffalo cast him forward, and the missile left him scathless.

"This is getting decidedly hot," said the brave boy, although his hair was straightening on his head. "I must do something or I'll lose my back hair, sure as fate."

And again he made an attempt to grasp his rifle.

But to his intense surprise he did not hear another shot, and turning his head he could see no signs of his would-be murderer.

"What the deuce has become of him?" ejaculated the astonished boy.

The next instant he learned the reason, for like himself the gambler had taken a tumble, and was indulging in some of the most lively aerial gyrations imaginable, which caused Bill to roar with laughter, notwithstanding the serious predicament in which he himself was placed.

But his hilarity was of but short duration, for before he could pull himself together and get his rifle into position, his recent antagonist alighted on the next buffalo, where, securing a hold, he drew his gleaming bowie and made a furious lunge directly for the beast.

"Curse you!" roared the gambler, as his eyes flashed with insatiate fury, "we are both doomed to death, it seems, but before I go I'll send you to the infernal regions you so richly merit, you young imp of Satan!"

"Never!" retorted Little Buffalo Bill, as his teeth gritted together with equal rage. "If either die, you shall be the first to join your master!"

And dodging back, he drew his own bowie-knife, and returned the blow, parrying the thrust and striking out with all his might.

The two blades crashed together, emitting sparks of fire, and forgetting the danger of their positions, both antagonists let go their holds on the buffaloes' manes and commenced hacking and cutting away with the utmost fury.

Meantime, while the desperate duel is in progress, it may be essential to explain how the gambler came to be in such close juxtaposition to our hero. When Little Buffalo Bill had been carried away to the bar-room of the ranch by the hunters, after worsting his antagonist, the gambler, upon his recovery, arose and slunk away towards his horse, muttering dire threats of vengeance against his boyish antagonist.

"So," said he to himself, "these cursed scouts have got news of our raid and are going for reinforcements. Well, I'll block their little game, I reckon, and perhaps capture them into the bargain. Santana, the chief of the black Apaches, is lying in wait but two miles from here with sixty of his best braves. I'll go and inform him at once and see what we can do."

No sooner had he decided upon the movement than he rode away to carry it into effect.

Taking a detour around the ranch by a path known to himself, the renegade, for

such he was, being a deserter from Uncle Sam's troops, made direct for the secret hiding-place of the Apache chief, passing along the base of the sand hills previously described.

But, unfortunately for himself, he too came in contact with the maddened herd of buffaloes, and before he knew it, was ridden down and unhorsed, when he was carried along in much the same manner as our hero subsequently was himself.

And thus it happened that while endeavoring to hold his own upon the buffalo's back, he came in contact with our hero.

With this brief explanation, let us return to the two combatants.

With their eyes flaming with rage, while the perspiration poured down their dust-begrimed features in streams, the two sat there glaring at each other like rival fiends.

"Curse you!" roared the gambler, gnashing his teeth with ungovernable fury, "I'll cut your heart out for that!"

And with a savage lunge he returned a thrust of Little Buffalo Bill that had cut a deep gash in his right hand near the wrist.

"I wish to Heaven that I had my revolvers," continued he, "and I'd do for you altogether."

"Thanks," replied our hero, slashing away again and inflicting another gash, from which the blood flowed profusely, "I'd like to return the courtesy, but I can't, seeing as how they are in my holster, but I reckon I can do you up with cold steel, and don't you forget it."

Whiz!

The gambler's knife cut through the air with a swishing sound, and Little Buffalo Bill felt the blood trickle down his chest from a deep blow just below the left nipple.

The renegade saw that he had made a home stroke from the workings of our hero's face, and prepared to end the latter at once in the most decisive manner.

Springing upon the buffalo's back upon his knees, he made another furious lunge with his dripping weapon.

Little Buffalo Bill saw his danger and lurched forward just in time to avoid the fatal stroke, and at the same instant saw a long, snake-like object whirling like lightning through the air above the head of the renegade.

CHAPTER VI.

SAVED BY A LARIAT.

MEANWHILE, as Little Buffalo Bill's horse stumbled and tossed his rider on top of the herd of buffaloes, the hunters saw that it would be impossible to pass on, and wheeled around to save themselves, but so eager was each man for self-preservation that none had witnessed our hero's peril but Buffalo Bill.

"My God!" murmured the brave scout, as his face turned deadly pale, "the boy is killed to a dead certainty. Hold, boys!" shouted he, turning instantly in his saddle; "about face, and let's try to save our brave little comrade!"

But while making this frantic appeal the furious herd swept madly on.

But one of the hunters had been swifter in his flight than they, and succeeded in evading the flying herd.

This was Texas Jack, who, putting spurs to his mettlesome steed, had passed on ahead of the herd, when hearing Buffalo Bill's shout, he wheeled his horse at once.

It was then that he witnessed our hero's danger from the bullets of the murderously disposed renegade.

"By mighty!" ejaculated the taciturn scout, "something's got to be did, and that blamed quick; that infernal skunk'll kill the boy afore he can get in a square shot for himself."

Texas Jack pulled his trusty army revolver as he spoke, attempting to draw a bead on the desperado just as he fired the second shot. But in an instant he saw that Little Buffalo Bill was in point-blank range of the deadly weapon, and dreaded, notwithstanding his consummate skill, the wounding of him instead of his cowardly assailant.

Jack returned the revolver to his belt with a smothered oath, but in the next instant broke into loud laughter as he saw the gambler tossed aloft from his perch, where he turned and tumbled until Jack expected to see him hurled to his death beneath the trampling hoofs of the flying herd.

But fortunately for the renegade the devil invariably protects his own, and Jack saw

him alight beside Little Buffalo Bill and resume his assault with the cruel bowie. Again the scout raised his revolver, but again the boy's figure intervened, and it would have been fatal to attempt to shoot.

"Curse the luck!" snapped Jack, angrily; "why can't the youngster duck down and give a fellow a clean show?"

Then Jack commenced roaring at the top of his voice for our hero to lie low and give him a chance at a shot, but so loud was the noise of the trampling herd, so dense was the cloud of dust that surrounded him, and so actively was he engaged in guarding and returning the cuts and thrusts of his antagonist, that Little Buffalo Bill neither heard nor saw the shouts or the gesticulations of his would-be aid.

"Blast the little fool, he's deaf as an adder in the dog-days!" hissed the indignant scout. "I wish I could only get in range, but it can't be did. Ha!"

The exclamation was occasioned by a happy thought that had suddenly occurred to him, and which was instantly acted upon.

Spurring his horse close to the edge of the herd, Jack, reared up in his saddle, waving his hand to Buffalo Bill, who was on the opposite side of the herd. Bill seemed to comprehend his intention in a minute, for he wheeled his horse in turn, and dashed into position facing his companion.

"All ready!" roared Jack.

"Ay, ay!" retorted Bill.

But so loud was the roar of the herd that neither could scarcely hear the other.

But both understood the signal well, for in a second each uncoiled his lariat from his saddle-bow, whirling it like a flash of lightning through the air.

For a moment it spun through the air in a dark line, resembling the upward flight of an arrow from a bow, but as the thong lost its velocity it commenced to coil and wriggle like a serpent, and it was at this very instant that Little Buffalo Bill had witnessed the flight of the lasso of his great namesake.

The welcome sight caused his heart to leap with joy, for just as the renegade's knife descended, ready to bury its keen point in his quivering heart, the noose descended, encircling his neck with its flexible folds, hurling him backward, with eyes bulging from their sockets, and the parched tongue lolling from his throat in the throes of strangulation.

"Bully for you, B——" exclaimed he; but the remainder of the sentence was cut short between our hero's teeth with a snap that nearly carried away the tip of his tongue, as the lariat of Texas Jack coiled round his arms in turn, and straightening out, hauled him, bumping and tumbling, backward over the humps and haunches of the flying buffalo as Jack pulled in the slack and rode away, pulling Little Buffalo Bill after him.

Meanwhile, Buffalo Bill had performed a similar office for the renegade, but as the rope was around his neck instead of his arms, he was more dead than alive when he came bumping to the ground with a heavy thud that nearly knocked the little breath left completely out of his body.

Loud huzzas greeted the feat from the hunters, many of whom discharged parting shots at the rear of the departing herd, causing them to rear and tumble madly forward on the very backs of their flying comrades.

But presently all had passed except a few stragglers, who were shot down at will, when the hunters gathered around our hero and the renegade, the latter of whom had been dragged by the neck at the heels of Buffalo Bill's horse to the spot where Texas Jack had dismounted to release Little Buffalo Bill from his bondage.

"Glory, hallelujah!" shouted Buffalo Bill, jumping down and clasping our hero's hand; "glory to God that you are saved from such a deadly peril; but how do you feel after that tough ride?"

"Pretty rough, Bill," replied our hero, smiling, as he got up and shook himself together. "I feel as if I'd passed through a first-class thrashing machine with all the ap-purtenances in full running order; but where's that miserable cuss that wanted to kill me so all-fired bad?"

CHAPTER VII.

LITTLE BUFFALO BILL'S JUDGMENT.

"THERE, gol blame his ugly skin!" retorted Buffalo Bill, administering a sound kick to the prostrate renegade, "I wouldn't have left

a sniff of breath in his infernal carcass only that I wanted you to have the say in which way was the best to dispose of him, blame his cantankerous skin!"

"Let up on him a bit, Bill," said our hero, regarding the purple, swollen features of the half-strangled wretch with disgust. "What was your reason for wanting to kill me so bad?" was his next demand, addressing the renegade himself.

The man made no reply, but pointing to his swollen throat, which was still tightly environed by the galling lash, regarded him with a defiant scowl.

"Loose the lariat, Bill," said Little Buffalo Bill, "I want to ask a few questions of him."

"All right," replied Bill, complying with the demand, "but if I had my way, and justice her rights, Judge Lynch would make short work of him."

"I'm agreeable," answered our hero, "but let him speak for himself and defend his course if he can."

"Hear!"

"Hear!"

"Hear!"

Shouted a number of the by-standers, in chorus, as if highly pleased at the prospect of a little fun.

"Get up!" said Little Buffalo Bill, as soon as the renegade was released from the cord.

The man complied, but was still too weak to stand, so one of the hunters supported him while undergoing the investigation.

"What's your name?" demanded the young judge.

"What's the good in telling it?" answered he, doggedly.

"You'll find out," replied the boy, turning toward his namesake. "Lend me your revolver, Bill. I want to make the skunk find his tongue."

The weapon was tendered, and instantly covered the man's temple.

His face grew ashen and his knees began to tremble.

"Hold up," said he, with chattering teeth; "put up that shooter and I'll tell you all."

"Good enough," replied Little Buffalo Bill, dropping the revolver to his side. "What's your name?"

"Lew Lopez."

"Biz?"

"Cowboy."

"What were you lurking around the ranch for to-day?"

"To raise a stake."

"Now you are shouting," said the boy judge, "and you played your cards fine, but you settled for that, so we are quits; but how came it that you managed to waylay me again as you did?"

"By chance. I fell in with the buffaloes, and was unhorsed; I saw you, and thinking that my time was up, determined to give you a send-off."

"Right again, but you didn't. Have you got anything more to say?"

"No."

"Gents," continued Little Buffalo Bill, turning to the assembled hunters, "you have heard the evidence of this cringing wretch; he has admitted that he meant to kill me; what is your will?"

"Death!"

The words struck consternation to the miserable craven, and he sank upon his knees, covering his face with his hands.

"What have you to say against the sentence being passed upon you?" demanded our hero, sternly.

"Mercy, mercy!" pleaded the man, holding his hands up supplicantly.

"You had no mercy on me!" replied Bill, "and I will show none to you; you have been fairly tried and found guilty of attempted murder, according to your own confession. The sentence of the court is that you be taken to the nearest tree and hanged by the neck until you are dead, dead, dead, and may God have mercy on your guilty soul!"

A murmur of deep satisfaction greeted the rulings of the court, as the man held up his hands with a howl of dismay.

"For God's sake spare me, save me!" he moaned; "I am not prepared to die."

"You should have thought of that before," replied the boy; "it's too late to make the appeal now, for we have no time to waste words. Say your prayers and commend your soul to Heaven, for you must die in ten min-

utes. I can allow you no more time. Prepare him for death!"

Several of the hunters leaped from their horses and approaching the shrieking wretch lifted him to his feet.

Then binding his arms behind him, they formed a hangman's noose with a lariat, which they fastened around his neck, adjusting the knot beneath the left ear, pulling it taut.

"Away with him!" shouted our hero; "bear him to yonder grove and swing him up for the vultures to peck at!"

Placing the miserable man, who was roaring and pleading aloud for mercy, upon one of the horses, the hunters bore him away to a pine grove some eighth of a mile distant, and, fastening the other end of the cord to one of the branches, they awaited further orders.

"Are you ready?" demanded the boy scout.

"Yes."

"Have you anything further to say?" addressing the renegade.

"No."

"Let go!"

The man was sitting with his face toward the horse's tail, with the lasso drawn taut, and at the word one of the hunters administered a sharp stroke upon the horse's haunch with a switch.

With a snort of defiance the animal plunged forward at a gallop, leaving the renegade dangling in the air.

For a moment he fell until his feet nearly touched the ground, but the sharp recoil of the pine bough yanked up the rope, and as he bounded up in the air his legs drew up and his eyes bulged outward red and blood-shot as a dying yell came from his lips, the tongue swelling between the teeth, shutting off the cry in an instant.

"That will do," said Little Buffalo Bill, turning away with a slight shudder to avoid the sickening spectacle. "The law has been vindicated. To horse—to horse, and away to the ranch of Col. Allison!"

In a moment all were in saddle and riding rapidly out of the grove.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SLIGHT CLEW TO THE APACHE'S FLIGHT.

Two minutes had scarcely elapsed and the hunters had barely disappeared from view, when the painted features and plumed head of an Apache warrior poked itself through the bushes just back of where the hanging had taken place.

"Ugh!" said the savage, looking cautiously around as he uttered a low grunt. "White hunter kill Injun's friend before his face, but no stop—white hunter too many much for Injun—too bad, too bad!"

Then, seeing that the coast was clear and no one in sight, the Apache mounted the pine tree like a cat, and crawling out on the limb to which the renegade was hanging limp and nearly motionless, cut the lariat with his scalping-knife.

The renegade fell to the earth with a dull thud, and the next instant the Indian leaped down beside him, attempting the work of resuscitation.

It took him some time, but finally a faint color crept into the bloated cheeks, and the breath came and went in gasps.

Presently the renegade grew stronger, and, sitting up, gazed bewilderedly around him.

"Where am I?" demanded he, as if half dazed.

"The Forked Stick" (the name by which Lopez was best known among his friends the Apaches) "is better," said the Indian; "the white hunters with the big scouts from Fort Sheldon would have hanged him and sent him to the happy hunting-grounds; but Black Thunder was near, and though the hunters were too many for his vengeance, he waited and saved his friend from the long journey in the dark."

"Good!" gasped Lopez, pressing the Indian's hand, "you have saved my life, and I shall never forget the service. Black Thunder was wise that he did not attempt to stop the pale-faces, they would kill him; they go to the fort."

"Ugh!"

"Yes, although I do not know it for a fact, I believe that they are bound for Fort Fillmore or Fort Franklin."

"Good! This will be news for Gray Cloud and gladden his heart."

"I was on my way to tell him when the

pale-faces seized and attempted to hang me. Where is San-ta-na, San-ta-musa?"

"Far away; he has surprised the ranch of Col. Allison, carried off much cattle and stock, with the old man and his daughter."

"Ha, Miss Lucy?" demanded the renegade, as his eyes flashed. "This is news for me!"

The last words were spoken aside as the Indian replied:

"Yes, he goes north by the new moon that rises to-night."

"It is well; lead me to him, I have news."

"Are you strong?"

"Yes, strong enough to travel if you have a horse. I lost mine before being captured."

The Indian made no reply as the renegade staggered to his feet, but seeing that he was still very weak, offered his arm, leading the way into the brush.

After a walk of a quarter of a mile or more, they came to a clearing in which a couple of horses were picketed, and assisting the renegade to mount one, took the other, riding away in a north-easterly direction.

Meanwhile Little Buffalo Bill and his companions had continued their course nearly east across the prairie, until they met the stage road which ran southeast.

"Here we must part, boys," said Texas Jack, drawing rein. "I'm main sorry that our course leads in different directions, for I'd like to accompany you hugely, but biz before pleasure, you know."

"That's so," said Buffalo Bill, "and I'm just as sorry to part as yourself, but so long, and take care of yourself, old chum."

"You bet," replied Texas Jack, "and do the same; so long!"

Then they shook hands and parted, the main party riding east across the plain toward a range of sand hills.

By this time the sun was near down, and the shadows were creeping along the plain. Twenty minutes' rapid riding brought them to the top of the hills, and when they reached the level beneath a long tract of timber land stretched before them to the eastward.

Into this they plunged, taking the main road. Ten minutes more and they came out into a clearing, and at some distance they saw the smoldering ruins of the colonel's dwelling.

"By the living Jingo!" ejaculated Buffalo Bill, wrathfully, "if the blood-thirsty varmints ain't destroyed every stave and stiver!"

"And they shall pay dearly for it!" rejoined Little Buffalo Bill, with flashing eyes and swelling chest.

"Let's see which way the red skunks went," continued the scout, leaping from the saddle, and examining the ground attentively.

"This is it, boys," said he, pointing to a wide trail that was plainly visible, "but I don't believe the wily chief has gone all the way with the rest of his crowd. He'll be too sharp for that, depend upon it."

"That's so," remarked one of the hunters, as the scout leaped into the saddle again, leading the way at a brisk trot.

Presently they struck into the woods again and the lowering branches rendered it extremely dark.

Finally they struck two roads leading right and left, and Buffalo Bill dismounted again.

"It's almost too dark to see," said he, as he commenced examining the ground, "but I reckon I can fetch it."

Removing a pocket safe from his hunting-shirt, he struck a match. As the flame burned up with a pale blue glare, the scout muttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"I thought so," said he, holding up something white in his hand; "the devils have taken the path to the right."

The object that he held in his hand was a portion of a woman's dress that he had found fluttering on the trunk of a tree.

Just then a low sound was heard in the bushes, and Buffalo Bill sprang forward, revolver in hand, with his flashing eyes piercing eagerly into the gloom.

Every one seemed deeply interested, and our hero sprang to Bill's side.

"What is it?" whispered the boy.

"I don't know," replied Bill, "but it sounded like the crackling of a twig beneath some one's foot. Who's there?"

CHAPTER IX.

OLD CATO AND LITTLE CATO.

FOR an instant after Buffalo Bill's command there was no answer, and a dead si-

lence prevailed, broken only by the rustling of the forest leaves. Then he called again:

"Who's there, I say?"

Then came the sounds of feet retreating amidst the underbrush.

"Come on, half a dozen of you!" hissed he.

"Follow me—we must find who this is."

Some six of the hunters dismounted at once, and followed the scout into the brush, while the others remained anxiously awaiting his return.

As the pursuers pressed on, they could hear the party rushing wildly on in advance.

Whoever he was, he seemed to be making the best of his time, and it was so intensely dark that they could not see an inch before them.

"I don't believe it is a redskin," whispered Little Bill, who was close to the scout's side.

"Me either," replied Cody, "but whoever he is I'll make him sweat for it."

Meantime, Buffalo Bill rushed swiftly on, utterly regardless of the crackling of the brush beneath his feet or the rebounding limbs that cut his face as he neared the flying fugitive at every bound.

If the scout could have seen his man in the slightest degree, he would have fired; but as it was, he knew that it would be simply a useless waste of ammunition.

But presently the underbrush thinned out, and then the whole party emerged into a clearing.

Instantly Bill caught sight of the object of his pursuit.

By the light of the new moon, which faintly penetrated the clustering foliage overhead, all hands could see a dark figure tearing over the stumps and black mold as if he thought that Satan was in hot pursuit.

Nearly a dozen rifles covered him at once, and as many voices ordered him to stop.

But the stern demand seemed but to lend speed to his feet, which flew across the clearing with the velocity of the wind. On came his pursuers, equally bent on his capture.

"I've got him now!" shouted Buffalo Bill, pressing trigger.

But before the report came that would doubtless have carried a deadly messenger through the poor wretch's back, Little Buffalo Bill tossed up the rifle-barrel, dispatching the bullet harmlessly into the air.

"Hold up, boys!" shouted he, turning and moving his arms toward the others, "don't fire, it's only poor Cato, Col. Allison's woolly headed nig."

Instantly every piece dropped, and several of the hunters swore, while Buffalo Bill dashed swiftly on.

Just then the colored boy's toe stubbed a stump, and over he went, plowing up the loam like a stub-hoe.

Buffalo Bill was on him like a catamount, and whirling him over like a tortoise on his back, planted his knees across his breast, at the same time flourishing his bowie-knife in his face.

The whites of the negro's eyes glared wildly up in the moonlight as he urgently plead for mercy.

"Oh! for Gor Almighty's sake, good Mister Injun, don't kill and scalp a poor nigger dat neber done ye no harm!"

But as Little Bill reached his side and endeavored to explain matters, the scout, who had got his mad up, shook the negro savagely.

"Gol darn your infernal black skin!" shouted he, irately, "why in thunder didn't you stop when I called to you at first, you black skunk?"

"Oh! for Lor' Almighty's sake don't kill me!" still pleaded the frightened boy, who evidently still considered himself in the hands of a merciless redskin; "don't kill me, and I'll fess all!"

"The devil you will!" retorted his tormentor, shaking him savagely. "I've half a mind to throttle you for that same; but get up!"

Leaping to his feet, the hunter administered a kick with the toe of his cow-hide boot that lifted the ducky to his feet with a howl.

"Don't!" ejaculated Little Bill, pulling the scout back; "let the poor cuss get his wind, he's half scared to death already!"

"Wagh!" grunted Bill, indignantly. "Don't you know who I am?"

As the scared boy faced him, a faint, sickening smile pervaded his black face.

"Clar' ter gracious! I does now, boss," said he; "but goshy gollikens, ef I didn't think yer wuz one of the bloody Apaches gwine ter rise my wool!"

A loud laugh greeted the remark from the assembled hunters.

"Where did you come from, anyway?" demanded Buffalo Bill.

"Jus' give me breff and I'll tell yer all," was the reply; and as soon as he recovered a bit the boy continued: "You see, sir, it was just afore dinner, and pop and me had been back in de cornfield hoein' corn. When we heard de dinner horn we thought we wouldn't take de hosses home, so we hitched 'em to a tree, leavin' dem whar dey was to go down to de house. Wall, we hadn't gone funder dan de openin' ob de clearin' nearest de house, when we see dat it was clean surrounded by de Injuns. Dey had sot de house on fire, and was drivin' de hosses and stock before dem. Dey had de colonel fastened to one ob de hosses, and Miss Lucy to another, while de four hired men was on some ob de udder hosses. I could see dat dey had made a hard fight ob it, for de ole man was wounded, and so was de hired man; seberal ob de Injuns was wusted, too, for der heads was done up in bandages, and two ob dem lay clean dead on de grass. I see dat it wouldn't be no good ter try and do anythin', for it would be no use, so I just toted pop back into de woods and hid until dey'd gone clean away, while dey finally did, carryin' de prisoners and de dead along with 'em. Den we watched and see de house burn clean down, when pop and I took to de woods and hid again, waitin' till dark to try an' get to de fort ter gib de alarm. I'd just come down to de road to see if de coast was clear, when I dropped onder you, and I clar ter gracious if I didn't think you gemmen was more ob de Injuns."

"Rather complimentary to us," said our hero, with a laugh.

"Hugh!" grunted Buffalo Bill, "and that was the reason, you black skunk, that you wanted to tell all and give the old man away as well as yourself?"

"But what was I to do, boss? I was dead skeered."

"Keep your tongue between your teeth, boy, if you die for it. If I ever hear the like of it again I'll cut it clean out and serve it to the crows for bait."

Bill made a move toward Cato with his knife, and the negro ducked behind our hero, trembling with alarm.

"So you've got horses in the field, hey?" demanded Bill.

"Yes, sah, three on 'em."

"Well, trot 'em out lively, then, and come along with us, for we've waited too long already."

The negro darted away, returning in ten minutes leading three horses, on one of which was perched an aged negro, who from his grizzled wool might have served as Methuselah.

"Hello, Cato!" said the boy scout, "you appear to have had a pretty rough time of it, according to young Cato's report."

"Yes, indeedy," replied the old man, grinning and displaying his gnarled teeth, "I thought de old man's time had come—yes, indeedy."

"Well, you're safe enough now," said the scout, "but come, gents, we must return to the main road and be off."

At the command Cato leaped nimbly up before his father, while Buffalo Bill and his proteges took the other horses, the remainder of the party walking by their side.

CHAPTER X.

LITTLE BUFFALO BILL'S DREAM.

UPON reaching the spot where they had left the remainder of the party, they were warmly congratulated at their safe return.

"We thought that you'd been circumnavigated into some redskin ambush and gobbled up," said California Jeth, as his wrinkled features wreathed with smiles.

"It wasn't to be did, pop," said Buffalo Bill, "it don't lay in their tan-colored hides; but let's be gettin'; it's gettin' late."

Meantime he had dismounted and taken his own horse, which he had left behind when he went into the bush, while his young comrade, who, after his rescue, had been riding behind him, having lost his horse during his ride on buffalo back, retained that furnished by young Cato; old Cato riding the other.

In this manner they fell into column again at a brisk trot.

Being once more upon the main road, the overhanging canopy of clustering leaves shut

out the moonlight, rendering it extremely dark, and making it necessary to use the utmost precaution to keep in with the trail.

Every now and again Buffalo Bill and others of the party would dismount and examine the ground closely to ascertain if they were right, and then remount and dash on anew.

In this manner they had halted some dozen times or more, when Buffalo Bill uttered a growl and indulged in a string of oaths.

"By the everlasting jumping catamounts," shouted he, savagely, "the cussed skunks have given us the slip at last."

"Why so?" demanded our hero, in dismay.

"Because they have," replied the scout.

"The trail is lost, and do my cussedest I can't find it again. I thought I couldn't be bamboozled in the darkest night that ever sot in, but it's did to-night; there ain't the slightest use looking further till daylight, and that settles it."

"It's too bad, but are you sure?" asked Little Bill.

"Dead certain, it ain't to be did. We must camp till daylight, and that's all there is about it."

"But couldn't we go back and look?"

"Yes, and get stumped again. Nary a time; we must wait till morning."

And, as Buffalo Bill had remarked before, that settled it.

The camp was made at once, the animals corralled, and the men lay down as they were.

By the advice of Buffalo Bill but a small fire was allowed, which was located at the foot of a large tree completely hemmed in by a thicket of cat briars.

Nearly all except the sentinel fell asleep at once. Not so with our hero; he was too deeply alarmed at the position of the captives to permit of it.

Young as he was, Little Buffalo Bill was deeply in love with the colonel's fair daughter, and as he lay there gazing anxiously up at a single bright star that had managed to find its way through the thick canopy of leaves, and was blinking and winking curiously at him, he rolled and tossed restlessly upon his hard pillow, wondering where she was and what was her situation in her captivity.

But somehow he must have fallen asleep at length, for a strange vision was unrolled before him. So realistic was it in all its surroundings that he scarcely realized that he had fallen asleep at all.

How he got there he had not the slightest conception, but suddenly he seemed to awaken from the reverie in which he had indulged to find himself standing in the center of a large room in an old-fashioned mansion.

It was richly and elegantly furnished in a manner that displayed the taste and culture of the fair mistress of the house.

It was a ladies' dressing-room, belonging to a suite situated just off the sleeping chamber that opened upon a conservatory of rare flowers.

Looking around, he cast but a casual glance at the spacious mirror over the dressing-table with its glittering array of toilet articles, many of which he had never seen before, for he seemed singularly attracted to the bedroom beyond, into which he speedily passed. Here upon a sumptuous couch, covered with fine linen and lace hangings, he saw a lady sleeping peacefully with an infant on her breast.

Both mother and child were uncommonly beautiful, and as he beheld them he thought that he had never before witnessed such a perfect picture of tranquil delight and pure affection.

But suddenly a somber shade surrounded the blissful dream.

Suddenly he heard an ominous creaking sound from the conservatory beyond, and turning his eyes in that direction he saw one of the windows gradually unclosing. As it opened to its fullest extent the warm clear light of the harvest moon poured a flood of radiance into the conservatory, casting through the thick foliage of the clustering vines shadowy impressions that shivered and shook upon the marble floor.

But what startled him the most was to see peering into the bed-chamber the swarthy features of a dark-hued man, whose wild, sparkling eyes glistened like balls of living fire.

Somehow those eyes riveted him like a spell; they seemed strangely familiar to him,

but when or where he had seen them before he could not for his life recall.

Meanwhile, after gazing cautiously around for a minute or more, the owner of the eyes pressed through the window, and crossing the conservatory, entered the bed-chamber where our hero was standing.

By his stealthy, cat-like movements, as the man approached the sleeping pair, Bill seemed to comprehend his intentions at once.

He seemed to realize that the ill-favored wretch was there for the purpose of child-stealing.

And such proved to be the fact, for the next moment he leant forward, tearing the sleeping infant from its mother's arms.

Bill started to arrest the desecrating hand, but seemed bereft of motion; his limbs seemed chained, he was utterly powerless.

He heard the frantic cry of the startled infant, the wild shriek of the mother as she darted from the couch in pursuit of the kidnapper.

He saw her grasp the cloak that the wretch drew around the child's face to smother its outcries.

He saw her drag him wildly back, shouting aloud for help, and then the brute turned, striking her stunned and bleeding to the carpet with his naked fist.

Bill strove to call aloud, but, like his limbs, his tongue seemed stilled.

Then, with a renewed effort to break the thrall, a cry of mortal agony burst from his lips, as he started up, with the ice-cold perspiration streaming from every pore.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE VERGE OF DEATH.

As he recovered his scattered senses and fully awoke, our hero beheld a black face with wide, distended eyes peering into his.

So severe had been the strain on his nerves, that he was on the point of shrieking aloud again; but by a powerful effort of his will he managed to refrain, and looking again, saw that the intruder upon his slumbers was simply old Cato, Col. Allison's venerable servant.

"Don't be afeared, honey," said the old man, drawing his wrinkled hand gently over Bill's forehead and producing an agreeable and soothing sensation thereby; "de ole man knows all about it. You've seen a vision, hasn't yer?"

For an instant Bill's brain was so muddled that he hesitated how to reply, but another look from the aged negro's eyes, and another passage of the magnetic hand, served to reassure and calm him sufficiently to permit of speech.

"I suppose that it was something of the kind, Uncle Cato," replied he; "but I can't exactly tell what to make of it. It was certainly a strange and startling dream, and I haven't got over it yet."

"What was it like, honey?" demanded Cato, eagerly. "Tell de ole man what it was like, and maybe he can help you out in it. I'm allowed to hab de gift ub fortellin' and interpretin' dreams and visions."

"A sort of a second Joseph, hey?" said Bill, laughing.

"Don't make fun ob de power, my son," said the old man, shaking his head and pointing warningly upward. "It's just given by One above, who knows all, and is far wiser dan any ob us poor mortals can eber be. But we mustn't stop here fo' idle ears to hear; come and trust in de ole man hisself, and he'll try and help ye out."

Cato led the way a little back of the camp, where he sat down on the trunk of a tree in the moonlight.

He appeared a strange sort of a confidant, but nevertheless our hero seemed forced to confide in him, and told him what he had seen in his dream.

"Um, um, honey," said the old man, scratching his woolly head, while a puzzled expression lit his eyes; "I always thunk it, and now I'm dead sartain ob de fact."

"What fact?" demanded Bill, who was more perplexed than ever.

"Why, dat Miss Lucy wasn't Col. Allison's daughter, ter be sure."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Just what I say," replied Cato, with another significant nod; "it's a strange story, but I'll tell ye all I know 'bout it, for I know you love Miss Lucy better dan de apple ob your eye, Massa Bill."

"What makes you think so?" asked Bill, blushing to the roots of his hair.

"'Cause I knows it," replied Cato; "de ole man can see as fur through de holes ub a forty-foot ladder as de next one if he am nigh onto blind as a badger, and don't ye forget it, honey. But dis am what it amounts to. You know dat de colonel's wife died nigh onter fifteen years ago?"

"Yes."

"Wall, perhaps you ain't aware dat de missus and him was separated for some time previous to her death."

"It's news to me."

"Wall, it's a fact," replied Cato, "it's nigh onter sixteen years ago when dey hitched together again, and remained so until she died. I remember it right well, honey, and it was a bright day at de Allison ranch when he brought de good missus back from St. Joe, where she'd been stoppin' for four years. I tell you dere was a rare ole time and plenty of fun. Wall, de missus brought along Miss Lucy, who was just a little ober a year old den, an' a right pretty little baby she was. I'll neber forget the fust time she learned to walk. God bless her dear little soul."

"But what makes you think that she is not the colonel's child, Cato?" asked Bill.

"I don't know 'xactly," answered the old man, scratching his head again, "but from a word dat I onct chanced ter hear between de missus and de colonel, I got de idea, and now I'm sure ob it."

"Can't you be more precise about it and give me further intelligence, Cato?"

"I might if I thought I could trust you," replied the old man, dubiously.

"I'll give you my word of honor to keep your secret."

"I will trust ye, honey," said Cato, and approaching our hero he whispered something in his ear.

Bill gave a great start of surprise. "Did she say that?" demanded he.

"Yes, indeedy."

"Then perhaps you are right; this thing must be looked into, and perhaps we may find more in the future."

Cato nodded his head and rubbed his hands elatedly.

"Dat's de talk, Massa Bill," said he, "and if any one can do it, you can, and de ole man 'll do his bestest to help yer; yes, indeedy."

By this time it was approaching dawn, and as soon as sufficient light afforded, stakes were pulled up and the hunters broke camp. What had been almost an impossibility at night was an easy matter in the morning; the lost trail was readily found, and the pursuers were once more in hot foot chase of the plundering redskins.

It was nearing half-past eight in the morning when the hunters reached the foot of a rugged range of mountains, across which the trail stretched in advance.

Just as they commenced the ascent Buffalo Bill suddenly drew rein, and pointed upward.

"There go the red devils!" said he, cheerfully, "and they haven't the slightest idea that we are in pursuit."

Sure enough, just at the spot to which he pointed was plainly to be seen a band of some forty Indians, with the prisoners in their midst.

A wild shout went up from the hunters at the welcome sight, and, putting spurs to their horses, the gallant band rode swiftly up the mountain.

It was apparent from the movements of the Indians that they had heard the shouts of their pursuers, for they turned suddenly, and looking down, held a hurried council of war, after which they resumed their flight at accelerated speed.

But the hunters had the best horses, and, putting them to their mettle, rapidly approached the foe.

For a brief interval, while riding upward, the Indians were out of sight, but upon reaching the mountain top, they again appeared in view.

A large plain presented itself, and at some eighth of a mile distance the Apaches were seen forcing their prisoners across a bridge.

"Ride them down and cut them off!" shouted Buffalo Bill. "Charge!"

Every spur told home in the quivering horseflesh, as with a wild shout the hunters sped on, discharging shot after shot at the flying Indians.

But scarcely had they reached the bridge before the last Indian had crossed, and in-

stantaneously it quivered beneath the united blows of four axes and tottered over into the abyss beneath with a crashing sound.

Buffalo Bill and his young companion were so close to the falling bridge that the former had barely time to rein in his horse as it went down.

Not so with the latter, for his horse's hoofs were already on the fated bridge.

He could feel it tremble beneath him with the last blow of the ax.

With a cry of alarm he strove to turn back.

It was too late.

He was already tottering downward with his struggling steed.

CHAPTER XII.

TO THE RESCUE.

As they witnessed the fall of Little Buffalo Bill, the Indians manifested their delight by taunting cries and jeers, and shook their heads and stuck out their tongues derisively at the appalled hunters.

But their scoffings were cut short by another volley of shots that emptied a couple of saddles in as many seconds, when the remainder of the savages speedily took cover behind the nearest bushes.

Meanwhile Little Bill's friends had ridden up to the verge of the precipice, where looking over, they could see himself and horse dashing downward with the velocity of the wind.

The terrible sight sickened the stoutest heart, and even Buffalo Bill himself, used and accustomed to scenes of danger and peril as he was, turned pale as death.

But the next moment he uttered a cry of joy.

"By the living Jingol!" exclaimed he, "but the boy is saved from death by a miracle."

It seemed, indeed, as if this was veritably the case, for as the horrified scout stood looking anxiously down at the flying figure of his boyish companion, he saw the horse strike with a terrific crash against the butt of a dwarf pine that jutted out from the verge of the precipice.

So sudden was the stoppage of the horse's flight, that it hurled its bewildered rider completely over his neck into the quivering branches, where he clung tenaciously, waving to and fro from the force of the stroke, bewildered and dazed beyond measure at his sudden and miraculous escape from such a terrible death.

For an instant the poor horse whinnied with terror as he vainly strove to retain footing on the narrow shelving bed of rock and sand that sustained the tree, but the effort failed as with a shriek of almost human agony the frantic beast tottered backward into the abyss, carrying away a large portion of the embankment in his fall, as he went keeling over and over in mid-air, toward the waving mass of pine trees at the bottom, over three hundred feet below.

The brave hunter turned away, sick at the sight of the poor brute's sufferings, but as he heard him go crashing and tearing through the branches to his doom, he looked over the embankment again and saw that the little scout had sufficiently recovered to look up in search of aid.

"How goes it, boy?" shouted the scout, waving his hand encouragingly.

"Pretty bad, Bill," replied our hero, smiling faintly as he strove to move, but uttering a cry as he did so; "I'm saved, but I'm a solid fixture; either my back's broke or both arms are."

"Not so bad as that, I hope?"

"I'm afraid it is, for I can't budge an inch."

"How are your legs?"

"Alive and kicking; but my hands and arms ain't worth a puff of powder."

"That's too bad; but keep up your pluck, and I'll see what can be done for you."

"All right."

Then Buffalo Bill turned away to hold a consultation with his companions.

"I'll tell you what can be did, boys," said he, after a brief pause, following several proposals from the group; "one of us might fasten a lasso around his waist, go down the cliff and fasten another around Little Bill's waist, and then we could haul him up."

"But if his arms are broke," replied one of the hunters, "it would nearly kill him."

"Might as well diethat way as to starve to

death down thar," said California Jeth, stowing away a huge quid of army plug.

"That's logic, Jeth, and as it's risky, I'll go down myself."

Here several of the others volunteered, when little Cato spoke up.

"See heah, Massa Cody," said he, "I'se de smallest and de youngest in de crowd, and only a poor nigger anyhow—so, if anything happens ter me, it won't count much. Let me go down; I wants ter do somethin' for young Massa Bill, I does."

Buffalo Bill stood looking curiously at the colored boy for an instant or so, and then seized him by the hand, wringing it warmly.

"You're a perfect brick, Cato. I didn't give you credit for this," said he. "I'm sorry that I gave you such a rough shaking-up as I did last night, 'deed I am. Shake!"

"Yes, sah, certain forgot all 'bout dat ah, 'clar ter gracious," replied Cato, grinning until his black face seemed all mouth.

"You're a good boy, and I shan't forget this of you," continued the scout, while preparing his lasso and testing its strength.

"Now, then, are you ready?"

"Yes, sah," replied Cato, shaking hands with his father in case of accident. "Keep up yer pluck, ole man."

"Sartin, son, de good Lord spare yer."

"Amen!" retorted Buffalo Bill, as he secured the slip-noose under the boy's arms and placed another in his hands. "Over you go. Look out for yourself against the rocks. Steady on the rope, boys."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Cato was swinging over the precipice, down which he went, turning and twisting until his head swam from the numberless gyrations.

Presently he uttered a cry.

"All right!"

The men hauled in the slack.

Buffalo Bill looked over the verge.

He could see Cato standing on the root of the tree, and then commence crawling slowly towards Little Buffalo Bill.

"It's all right," said Cody, turning toward the hunters.

But the next instant two wild cries of alarm floated up the precipice.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT WAS TOO LATE.

"My God, what's that?" shouted Buffalo Bill, darting hastily on the verge of the cliff.

"What is it?" demanded several of the hunters, as they felt the lariat tauten in their hands.

"The tree is giving way!" retorted Buffalo Bill; "hold hard for your lives. Quick, Cato, slip the noose over his arms before he goes. Never fear but we'll hold you both safe."

The poor negro strove to do his bidding, but was too late. He could feel the frail tree shake and shiver beneath his weight as he crawled on. Already his hands were close upon the anxiously waiting boy, when with a crash, accompanied by a tearing, ripping sound, the roots gave way at the base, carrying a large portion of the embankment with them, and went tearing down the declivity, leaving the startled negro suspended and dangling in mid-air, completely enveloped in blinding clouds of dust and sand.

Meanwhile Buffalo Bill stood on the verge of the cliff looking eagerly down.

He could see the tree slowly breaking away; he could see the roots sever from the base, and then, as the cloud of dust arose, he knew what had happened.

Faint and sick at heart, he staggered back and nearly fell.

One of the hunters grasped him by the arm, demanding what had occurred.

"He's gone; the tree has given way, and gone down the precipice," replied Cody, "and Little Buffalo Bill is killed!"

"Don't say that, Bill," replied the hunter.

"Perhaps it's not so bad as you think."

"God grant that it isn't," ejaculated he, in reply. "But pull up poor Cato, for he must be nearly frightened to death."

Strong arms were instantly at work upon the rope, and presently the trembling negro was drawn to the surface, more dead than alive.

"Oh, Massa Bill, Massa Bill," groaned he, with chattering teeth, "de poor chile is done gone for certain."

"I hope not," replied Cody, releasing the lariat from Cato's arms.

"God is good, son," said old Cato, looking

up supplicatingly to heaven. "Trust ter him."

"All right," retorted the scout; "but we've got to lend a hand ourselves, and maybe we can aid some. To horse! I know a route to the ravine below, and if Little Buffalo Bill ain't killed, we'll help him out. Follow me, and then we'll put after the red devils and make 'em sweat for this."

A loud shout greeted the proposal as the whole troop remounted and dashed eagerly away in hot pursuit of Buffalo Bill, who was dashing ahead, spurring his horse to its utmost speed.

Taking the back track, Buffalo Bill led his followers some half a mile, when he turned south through a narrow gorge leading to the valley beneath.

It took them some half an hour to reach the bottom, where they entered a dense thicket of pine, cedar and cat briars, and so closely was it interwoven with the latter that it was impossible to penetrate further with the horses.

Dismounting, a party were left in charge of the horses, while the remainder proceeded onward on foot.

Even in this manner progress was extremely slow, for the hunters were forced to cut a passage through the thorny vines with their bowie-knives, which occupied considerable time.

But finally they reached the locality of Little Buffalo Bill's perilous plight.

His course was plainly visible by the uprooted bushes which had been torn piecemeal by the avalanche.

Presently they reached the unfortunate horse.

He lay doubled up in a heap, feet uppermost, against the base of a large cedar.

He was stone dead.

His head was battered into a shapeless mass by the concussion with the trunk of the tree, and his brains were scattered in all directions.

The two negroes regarded the sickening spectacle with sad faces.

"Poor Zip!" exclaimed the old man, "you has come to a dre'ful death, and I'se right sorry to see it, 'deed I is."

"Never mind the horse, old man," said Buffalo Bill; "let's be looking after Little Bill, and see if he is still alive."

"De good Lord allow," said Cato, shaking his head dubiously as they pressed on.

Presently they reached the pine tree where it had ceased its flight.

It was shattered and terribly torn where it rested at the base of a tall pine tree. Stooping down, the scout examined it closely, but no traces of Little Bill were to be found, the only signs of him that remained being a pool of blood upon the shattered branches.

Search as they would, this was all that was to be found.

"It ain't no use," said Buffalo Bill, after they had traced the path of the avalanche to the base of the cliff, where its course was plainly visible on the shelving side; "the poor boy has been utterly torn to pieces, or fallen into the hands of the Injuns. Come on; we must follow the red devils up and save Col. Allison and his daughter, if possible. Maybe we can do the same by Little Bill!"

But, as he returned to the spot where they had left the horses, accompanied by his comrades, his heart sadly misgave him that the latter was but a forlorn hope.

CHAPTER XIV.

WAS IT A VISION?

MEANWHILE, what had really befallen Little Buffalo Bill?

Let us see.

As his steed leaped upon the fragile bridge over the abyss, he could see the Indians cutting vigorously away at its supports with their axes.

By the way it tottered and wavered, he knew that it would be utterly impossible to cross before it fell, so discharging the two last shots from his revolver at the redskins, he turned rein, endeavoring to regain solid ground.

But he was too late, for before he could effect his purpose, the bridge gave way, and he found himself plunging wildly downward.

He felt his breath fail, and a singing sensation reigned in his ears as his heart seemed to leap into his throat. His next memory was of finding himself lodged in the branches of the tree, with the poor horse careering

downward to his doom, and hearing the reassuring voice of his companion above him.

Then he saw Cato launched over the verge of the cliff, and beheld him slowly descending to his aid.

With anxious gaze he saw him reach the butt of the tree and come crawling toward him.

Then came the ominous cracking sound, followed by his despairing cry, as he felt the tree part from its hold and go tearing down the precipice.

As it increased its velocity with a terrific pace, he could feel the mud whizzing by and penetrating his ears until they ached as if pierced by daggers. The blood rushed into his head until his eyes seemed fairly bursting from their sockets from the excruciating pain.

Everything seemed flying by and dancing before his gaze; his breath came and went in low, faint gasps as his stomach turned deathly sick. But on, on he flew in the mad race, until it seemed as if he could bear it no longer and live.

Then came a heavy thud as the tree struck. A feeling like an electric shock beset him, and his senses utterly deserted him.

Gradually as his scattered senses returned, a prickly sensation pervaded every portion of his frame, as though he were being stuck full of red hot pins and needles, and then he experienced a racking twinge in his left arm and shoulder that caused him to groan aloud with pain as he nearly fainted again.

But as he recovered somewhat, and opened his eyes, he beheld a strange, fantastically-dressed figure, resembling a woman, bending anxiously over him.

"Where am I?" demanded he, faintly, of the strange shape, regarding it with amazement.

The figure placed a long, bony finger to his lips, uttering a low "Hush!"

"You must not speak," it said, with a warning look; "you are badly hurt, and must trust implicitly in me. Drink this and you will be better presently."

The figure bent kindly over him, holding a calabash to his lips as it supported him with its arm.

Little Bill obeyed unquestioningly. The potion, whatever it was, was cool and pleasant to the taste, and had a soothing and quieting influence on his nerves.

Presently a calm, benumbing feeling crept over him, all sense of pain deserted him, his eyes closed, and he fell into a quiet and refreshing slumber.

When he awoke he felt greatly relieved, and opening his eyes gazed wonderingly around.

He found himself reclining upon a rude but comfortable bed covered with skins.

The apartment in which he lay seemed partially constructed of logs and hanging curtains, composed of skins of various animals.

At a slight distance, the strange figure that he had beheld at his first awakening from his swoon, was seated before a fire, over which she bent, preparing some decoction in an iron skillet.

As our hero uttered a slight cough, she turned toward him, and he saw that she was a tall woman, dressed in a fantastic garb composed of doeskin covered with strange figures worked in Indian beadwork and curiously dyed feathers. On her head was a coronet of similar construction, which glittered and shone in the firelight like burnished gold.

Although tall and emaciated, she was exquisitely formed, and her tanned face, with its deep-set, flashing eyes, displayed marks of surpassing beauty in by-gone days.

"You are much better, my poor boy," said she, calmly, as she arose and came to his side to examine his pulse.

"Yes, but where am I?" replied Little Bill, striving to sit up; "and how is it that my life has been spared?"

"You must not talk," said the strange hostess, forcing him gently back upon the couch. "Your arm is broken, and you are still very weak. Suffice it that I found and brought you to my dwelling. I will explain all when you are well enough to listen. Drink this."

Going to a cupboard covered by a curtain, she procured the calabash, tendering it to him again.

Without questioning he drank the contents, and again the somnolent influence overcame him.

Was it a dream?

As he closed his eyes he again seemed to see the dark-featured man that he had witnessed in the vision on the night of Lucy Allison's abduction, creeping stealthily into the room.

CHAPTER XV.

JUST IN TIME.

WHEN he awoke, our hero gazed around as if half expectant to behold the dark-featured man by his side.

But he was disappointed. No one was in the room save his hostess.

It must have been simply a partial repetition of the former vision, recalled by the opiates administered to soothe his nerves.

With a weary sigh he turned toward the wall and fell asleep again.

Let us return to Buffalo Bill and his companions.

On reaching the horses all hands remounted and rode dejectedly away.

Finally they struck into the mountain road again and after pursuing it for a mile or more, came out upon the plateau upon the opposite side of the disabled bridge.

Here they found ample evidences of the trail taken by the Apache war party.

The savages evidently considered that they were rid of their pursuers by the careless manner in which they had ridden on.

"The red fiends seem to think that they've given us the shake," said Buffalo Bill, gritting his teeth; "but I reckon they'll find their mistake before night!"

"Now you're shouting, pard!" said California Jeth; "hey?"

"You bet!"

Half an hour later the hunters came out on the verge of the prairie.

Buffalo Bill gave vent to a gratified shout as he pointed out toward the waving grass, where the war party were plainly to be seen but half a mile in advance.

"Go for 'em!" roared he, bringing his trusty rifle to bear, "and don't forget Little Buffalo Bill."

"Never!"

Thus came the sharp reply, as every spur told home and every horse sprang forward like an arrow from the bow.

Crack!

The report of the scout's rifle sent a leaden messenger in pursuit of the unconscious foe, and one of the Apaches dropped from the saddle as a perfect fusillade of fire-arms ensued.

In an instant the surprised savages turned and beheld their danger.

Then realizing that it was fight or die, they turned, presenting a solid front. Even an Indian will fight where there is no chance to skulk or run away. On rode the hunters, firing at will. The Apaches returned shot for shot, and several of the hunters were wounded, but, regardless of the scathing fire, the gallant men pressed boldly on.

Presently both parties were at close quarters, and a hand-to-hand conflict ensued.

Now the deadly revolvers came into execution and did fearful work.

Crack, crack, crack!

Crack, crack, crack!

Shot after shot rang sharply over the prairie, and reverberated from the adjacent hills.

But regardless of the leaden storm that rained around, threatening instantaneous death, Buffalo Bill shouted to several of the hunters, and cutting his way through the main line, slashing right and left with his murderous bowie, he bore down, closely followed, upon a small party headed by the chief, who surrounded the captives.

Crack!

A bullet flew by the scout's temples, cutting off one of his flowing locks, but Buffalo Bill shook his head with a derisive smile as he buried his blade in the heart of his would-be slayer.

With a wild cry the Indian tossed up his arms, displaying his painted breast, from which the blood flowed in torrents, turning it a deeper red.

Cut!

Thrust!

Bang!

Down went a redskin as every blow, until the hunters reached the captives' sides.

"Hurrah—hurrah!"

The fight was over.

Lucy Allison and her father were free!

CHAPTER XVI.

A SECRET CONFERENCE.

BUFFALO BILL had scarcely finished shaking the hands of the released captives before he turned suddenly toward the captured chief, fixing his blazing eyes sternly upon him.

"I would speak to San-ta-na," said he.

The captive nodded his head, giving vent to a dissatisfied grunt.

"It is well," he replied, "but my arms are bound."

"That does not concern the chief's tongue," replied Bill, sternly. "It will be well for him if he speaks straight and not crooked."

"San-ta-na never lies."

"Waugh!" ejaculated Bill. "Unbind him. I wish to confer with him alone."

The two hunters who held the captive obeyed the scout's orders, and he led the chief a slight distance from the party and paused.

"San-ta-na knows who I am?" he asked.

"Yes," came the measured reply, "you are the white chief of the Buffaloes."

"Yes," replied Bill, "and you shall feel my power unless you speak the truth."

The chief nodded, but deigned no reply.

"You saw the young hunter who was hurled from the bridge into the black pass?" asked the scout.

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

"I do not know."

"You lie!"

"The white scout is brave to talk thus to a captive."

Bill winced; he saw that his passion had led him too far.

"Gray Cloud speaks the truth!" he replied; "he will forgive me; I ask his forgiveness. It is well, but I have spoken the truth."

"Then you know not where he is?"

"I do not!"

"Your young men have not made him prisoner?"

"San-ta-na has spoken true; his tongue is not forked; it cannot lie!" replied the chief, waving his hand sadly toward the small band of Indians that remained alive; "yonder are all that live of the braves that started before the new moon to gain redress for the wrongs done us by the Great Father in Washington."

"He is not to be found!" replied Bill; "we have searched the bottom of the ravine, and no traces of him are to be found."

A crafty smile lit the swarthy features of the chief.

"So," said he, "then he has been torn to pieces by the wild beasts of the mountains; it is well, and my slaughtered chiefs are partially avenged."

"Waugh!" ejaculated Buffalo Bill, raising his hand as if to strike the chief.

But he thought better of it before doing so, while San-ta-na stood rigidly silent, with his arms folded placidly over his bosom.

"Then you know nothing of our young companion?" demanded the hunter again.

"I have spoken!"

"That settles it," replied Bill. "Git!"

With a quick movement Buffalo Bill faced the chief about, motioning with his hand toward his fellow-hunters, and San-ta-na instantly obeyed his bidding.

When he reached his friends, Buffalo Bill called California Jeth and several of the others aside to consult what was the best thing to do in regard to Little Buffalo Bill.

"I say, boys," said he, "you'd better notify the others that it is not advisable to say anything about Bill Martine's disappearance, for fear that it should come to the ears of Lucy Allison. He was sweet on her, you know, and it would break her dear little heart if she learned too suddenly what had happened to him. If that red skunk, San-ta-na, speaks the truth, Little Bill's caved in and gobbled up by wolves or bears, but I hope it ain't so; as we go back to the colonel's place I mean to take another look after the boy, and perhaps we may strike the trail of his captors in case he is a prisoner."

"Or more likely his bones polished off by the birds and beasts," replied Jeth.

"Never say die while there's a breath of wind in the carcass," said Bill, "and that's what it amounts to; now to get back to the fort as fast as our horses will carry us."

And in compliance with the order, all hands remounted and took the back track for the fort.

CHAPTER XVII.

LITTLE BUFFALO BILL'S ESCAPE.

Two weeks passed, during which interval, through the care and attention of his Indian nurse, Little Buffalo Bill became convalescent and was permitted to quit his bed.

In the meantime he learned from the mysterious woman that she was a great medicine and oracle of the Apache tribe; and although she did not say as much, Bill surmised from her accent and mode of address, that she was a white woman in disguise.

But if so, she was too close-tongued to admit the fact in reply in our hero's inuendoes, although she had meantime skillfully drawn from him the history of his life.

As he recovered sufficiently to move about, he found that the strange being's abode was a cavern amidst the mountains, where she lived the life of a hermitess, with the exception of a couple of huge wolf-hounds, which were constantly chained near the entrance.

He also made another discovery of a decidedly unpleasant nature; which was, that he was held in the light of a prisoner.

In fact, his strange companion had informed him that it would be as much as his life was worth to attempt to escape.

She told him of the search of his friends, and of the recapture of Lucy Allison and her father by Buffalo Bill.

The information gladdened his heart and set his mind at rest; but, without saying so, he decided to attempt to escape at the first opportunity.

It was early in the forenoon of a warm day, some two months after his capture, that his custodian told him that she was going away for several hours, and possibly might remain over night.

She warned him again of the danger that awaited him in case he tried to escape, and lengthened the dogs' chains so that they could readily attack Bill if he made the attempt.

Then showing him where the provisions were kept, she bade him good-morning and departed.

Nearly two hours passed in a dreary and monotonous manner, when looking toward the door, Bill saw that the dogs lay stretched out, with their eyes closed and their heads resting on their paws as if asleep.

If it was indeed so, now was his chance, and Bill took advantage of it at once.

Going to the corner, he grasped his rifle, and looking to the priming of his pistols, crept cautiously toward the hounds.

In the center of the doorway was suspended a rope which dangled invitingly downward.

A happy thought suggested itself to Bill, which he acted on at once.

Seizing the rope, he moved the bed into the center of the room.

Then, taking a firm grasp as far up the cord as he could reach, he wound his legs around it, and taking a flying leap, was carried like an arrow far above the heads of the sleeping dogs.

But the sound of his feet on the cavern floor as he landed awakened the hounds instantly.

With savage bays and blood-shot eyes, they leaped up, with distended fangs, and sprang to the end of their chains, barking furiously, and striving to reach and rend the boy to pieces.

But Bill was too spry for them. With a quick bound he released the rope and sprang to a safe distance, raising his rifle to his shoulder, ready to fire.

But, fortunately, he remembered himself in time, and recovered arms, which was the wisest movement he could have taken.

"Blamed if I wouldn't like to polish you off, you infernal brutes!" ejaculated he, "but I reckon it won't do. So long!"

And rifle in hand, the boy hunter started onward, piercing the darkness of the cavern with his flashing eyes.

Gradually, as he proceeded on through the serpentine twistings of the path, the sounds of the baying dogs grew fainter and fainter, until they were silenced altogether.

Gradually his eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, until finally he beheld a red light resembling a star twinkling in the distance.

As he went on and drew nearer, the illumination increased in volume and brilliancy, until he could distinctly see his way.

He now saw that he was in a gallery look-

ing down at a vast amphitheater, resembling a grand cathedral with its arched roof and colossal pillars.

So immensely grand was the spectacle that our hero paused in speechless wonder.

Beneath him, as far as the eye could reach, he beheld the nave and corridors stretching away into Stygian darkness.

On either end of the main corridor, two large fires of pitch pine were crackling and blazing away at a furious rate, casting up clouds of smoke toward the corrugated dome with rings and ribs of rock, ring within ring narrowing away to the top where the smoke floated away to the open air.

But it was not the dazzling beauty of the scene that held him spell-bound, another strange and startling sight struck his gaze.

Stretched out beneath him upon the cavern floor, some of them sitting, others standing about conversing in groups, were at least three hundred Indians in paint and wampum with their squaws and papposes gathered around.

But the cause of the strange gathering was simply a matter of conjecture to the bewildered boy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FIGHTING FOR A BRIDE.

LITTLE BUFFALO BILL'S doubts, however, were of but short duration, for as he stood regarding the strange gathering with rapt attention, taking excellent care meantime to hide himself from observation, he saw his late custodian approach one of the fires.

As she did so, an old chief came slowly forward, bowing his head to her with great respect. The woman held out her hand and bowed in return, after which the chief led her aside, where they conversed in such low tones that Bill was unable to make out what they said.

Some ten minutes elapsed when they approached the main group again, and the old chief led the woman to a rude settee, covered with furs, where they sat down.

Having done this, the chief waved his hands, clapping them three times sharply together.

At the signal six Indian maidens, bedecked in native finery, came slowly forward from a remote portion of the cavern.

In their midst was a lovely specimen of the Indian race, a girl apparently of seventeen or eighteen summers, who walked reservedly on, with bowed head and downcast eyes.

By this time Bill realized what it all meant, an Indian wedding was to follow.

But for his life he had not the slightest idea of what the preliminaries were to be.

When the procession reached the front of the old chief, the members bowed and stood rigidly silent with bowed heads.

After a moment's pause he nodded his head and waved his hand, when, making room for him, the bride-elect sat down by his side.

Then a couple of squaws brought a lighted pipe to him, which he took and commenced smoking in a calm and complacent manner.

By this time the remainder of the group had seated themselves like the chief, and the buzz of conversation utterly ceased.

Then two young braves, neither of them over twenty-four, stepped into the center of the ring formed by the seated guests.

Both were tall and supplely built, exhibiting strong and muscular development.

Both were barefooted, wearing simply deer-skin leggings with fringed trimmings, and their naked breasts were painted and oiled to a high degree.

Their hair was bound back and fastened with strings, and as they stood facing each other, traces of anxiety were visible upon every feature, for everything they held sacred and dear in existence rested on the result of the approaching contest.

By this time Little Bill, who was pretty well versed in Indian lore, realized that the two bucks were about to contend for the hand of the bride, who was to be the prize of the winning brave.

Rolling Thunder, the taller of two (Bill had seen both frequently before and knew their names), displayed a muscular chest and long, wiry development of arms.

Bear Trail was not so tall, but was better developed in the legs; and although his chest was not so deep and his ribs were more apparent, there was a stockiness and strength about his underpinning that promised a stal-

wart resistance against the onslaught and crash of Rolling Thunder.

Formed in long lines, between which the combatants are preparing, the members of the tribe calmly await the opening of the struggle.

Down in front the warriors and old men are quietly smoking, and behind them are ranged the young women and the squaws.

The signal from the big chief is finally given, and Rolling Thunder is ready first, while his antagonist, a less nervous man, proceeds with more deliberation.

At length, however, he is ready, too, and the drums beat the signal for the attack.

From their position, fully a hundred feet apart, they dart at each other, vindictively meeting breast to breast with a force that is distinctly heard throughout the cavern.

Reeling, stumbling, whirling, they stagger backward, each striving to keep from falling to the floor.

Rolling Thunder has a little the better of it, for Bear Trail stumbles and is almost down; but he saves himself by a desperate effort, and retains his feet with the legs resting very wide apart, while his lungs pump wind like a bellows.

Though showing no traces of their excitement, the spectators are greatly moved, for such a rush without result is seldom witnessed in conflicts of such a nature as this.

Old Two Bears, the father of Ne-meta, the Indian maiden for whom the athletes are contesting, rubs his skinny hands with satisfaction, though his face betrays no emotion, for both contestants are well-to-do, and great braves in the hunt and battle-field.

The duelists have no seconds, each cares for himself during the intervals between the rounds, studying for himself the result of the former assault, and figuring out what advantages he may gain from the tactics of his enemy.

No more breathing-spell is permitted than the time allowed to walk to the place of starting at the usual habitual Indian gait, when again they turn and spring to the assault.

CHAPTER XIX.

ROLLING THUNDER'S DEFEAT.

In this bout, as in the first, Rolling Thunder has the advantage of speed, for the place of contest is nearer the starting point of Bear Trail.

But the latter is foxy, and as he dashes down the course at a frantic speed he swerves at the moment of collision, bowling Rolling Thunder off his chest like a billiard ball caroming from a table.

The crash is fearful.

The breath of both men is knocked clear out of them and they reel away fighting the air with their hands like drowning men grasping for life.

Bear Trail recovers first, while Rolling Thunder bowls down the course in a demoniac waltz, stamping like a buffalo bull, bending almost to the earth, which he must not touch with his hands to save himself from disgrace and defeat, but finally he rises, coughing, choking, dazed and dizzy, but presenting a calm and placid front, while covering his face and bleeding chest with his clenched hands.

Bear Trail is badly winded too, and begins to dislike the aspect of the situation, as an Indian fighter he should have won in the last round even if he failed in the first. Somehow he seems losing heart as it occurs to him that possibly the double failure predicts an ignominious and disgraceful defeat.

Passing each other on the way to their stations, neither condescends the other a glance. Their blood is boiling at fearful heat, and their panting breath is distinctly heard.

There is a low murmur along the line of lookers-on, congratulatory, no doubt, that they have been permitted to witness such an extended and hotly-contested combat.

Two Bears can hardly conceal his agitation as he eagerly awaits the next round.

Such a conflict he has never before witnessed. Its fame will go forth among all the tribes to do honor to the credit of the chief who shall win the hand of the fair Ne-meta.

The signal to fall to is again given.

Rolling Thunder and Bear Trail are not the men they were when first confronted.

In the last crash the former was decidedly worsted. His chest and face are hideously battered, and disfigured with blood and per-

spiration, and he is losing confidence from the fact that he is not already victorious.

As they face each other anew it is plainly seen that the more barbarous aspect of the battle is ended.

The men are too weak to run fast, too groggy and shaky to do much more damage; but they lunge toward each other at the signal, and it is obvious that one or both must fall.

Half of the course has been run, when Bear Trail swerves again.

But Rolling Thunder remembers the glancing blow that did him such fearful injury, and involuntarily slackens his speed.

Like a whirlwind Bear Trail, with his remaining energies gathered into the final charge, bears down upon his antagonist.

There is a crash, a staggering of the frames of the two combatants, and Rolling Thunder drops in his tracks like a log, while Bear Trail spins on beyond, barely saving himself from a fall by a hop, skip, and a jump.

The combat is ended, and Two Bears solemnly arises, declaring Bear Trail victor, as he shakes him by the hand and leads him to his daughter's side.

As he rises from the cavern floor, stunned and bleeding, with panting chest and quivering limbs, Rolling Thunder hears the drums and shouts of the delighted spectators, who gather round the victor to do him honor; and then, sinking his head dejectedly upon his breast, reels mournfully away, a sad, lonely and disgraced man.

Somewhere to-morrow up in the mountains the disgraced buck will be found with a bullet in his brain.

CHAPTER XX.

INTO THE DARKNESS.

OUR hero had frequently heard old hunters tell of just such conflicts as that witnessed by himself.

Thus, when the duel ended, he thoroughly comprehended the situation.

Both San-a-ga, "Rolling Thunder," and We-me-luck, "Bear Trail," had simultaneously applied for the hand of Wa-ka-sau's, "Two Bears" daughter, Ne-meta, "The Red Rose of the Prairies!"

Both chiefs were young braves of the Apache tribe, well known in the field and chase, with records of equal valor and personal goods and chattels of nearly the same value.

Thus while the old chief was loath to choose between them for fear of gaining the ill-will of the other and his kindred and friends, he warily chose the *dernier resort* in such a dilemma, a passage at arms.

Thus it was that the two met in secret, surrounded alone by their kindred and friends, to decide which was the braver of the two and who should carry off the prize.

Rolling Thunder being defeated and disgraced in the eyes of the tribe, must necessarily slay himself to overcome the odium attached to him.

Thus when the disgraced Indian skulked away with downcast head and shrinking frame Bill knew exactly what he contemplated.

Bill had known the defeated brave for some years, and redskin as he was, sincerely pitied him, for they had frequently hunted together in the mountains and on the plains, and the Apache had often befriended him.

"Poor fellow," thought he, "I am sorry for him and I wish that I could help him in his trouble, from the bottom of my heart."

But he had but little time to indulge in his kindly thoughts, for his attention was recalled to what was taking place beneath him.

As Bear Trail, the victor, bruised and battered, with face and chest covered with blood, approached the beautiful Indian, led by her father, the poor girl arose and stood with downcast head and averted eyes, silently awaiting the eager salute of the victorious chief.

But it was plainly evident from her manner that he was utterly repugnant to her, and not at all the object of her choice.

But what mattered that? The father's word was law. The Great Spirit had decided her fate, and, poor child, she must simply obey the decision, though her heart break in the sacrifice.

But Bear Trail apparently paid but little attention to her cold reception as he grasped her hands, pressing them ardently against his bleeding breast and lips.

Then the Indian raidens closed around,

while the medicine woman attended to the wounds and bruises of the victorious chief.

Meanwhile, the spectators, after tendering their congratulations to the espoused, gathered in groups to discuss the matter, while others prepared a great feast at one end of the hall.

Little Bill had become so deeply interested in what had occurred and what was now transpiring that he quite forgot his own danger or necessity to escape.

But he was suddenly recalled to the matter in a manner that caused his heart to jump into his mouth, and quickened his pulse to a wonderful degree.

Suddenly the pat-patter-pat of moccasined feet was heard softly approaching.

Turning instantaneously, his piercing eyes sought the gloom in the direction of the sound.

Was that a light he saw approaching?

Yes, for the somber walls of the passage were already brightening from its rays.

What was he to do?

If he remained where he was, discovery was certain; his only chance was to retrace his steps and trust to fortune to rescue him from his dilemma.

Grasping his pistols firmly, he loosened his bowie in its sheath, and stealthily crept backward.

The approaching light served partially to dispel the gloom, and by its aid he hastened on, eagerly looking to the right and left for some place of concealment where he could hide until the coming party had passed.

"Ha!"

Again the bewildered boy pauses.

Again he hears an ominous sound, foreboding evil.

It is the sound of approaching footsteps, coming in the opposite direction.

Merciful powers! is he to be hemmed in, front and rear, between the stony barrier, to be recaptured or hewn piecemeal by his ruthless foes?

The latter must be his fate, for the gallant boy has determined firmly never to be captured alive.

On comes the approaching light from the distance behind him.

The rays flicker and flash along the dark walls on either hand, casting strange, dancing shadows amidst the gloom.

But right ahead the light centers like a halo upon a winding in the passage.

"Ha!"

Little Bill uttered a gasp that had almost been a cry that would have betrayed him.

But with a stout will he restrained himself, while an icy perspiration burst from every pore.

He staggered back, trembling violently.

He feared not to face any living man, but the presence of death unnerved him.

Before this he had doubted that the dead could come to life.

He could doubt no longer, for right in the disk of the circle appeared the form of Lew Lopez, the renegade, whom he had condemned to death, and seen hanged in the grove of pines but two short weeks ago.

What was to be done?

Onward his trembling limbs refused to move, while on, on came the patter, patter of the approaching feet behind.

Must he remain there to be captured?

"No!"

He would go on in the face of death itself.

With this determination, Little Bill started forward.

But scarcely had he advanced a step before his feet gave way beneath him.

He could find no foothold as he went plunging down into utter darkness.

CHAPTER XXI.

OUT OF THE DARKNESS.

So sudden and unexpected was the fall that it nearly took away our hero's breath.

He could feel himself going downward at a speed that increased in velocity every moment.

Wildly he stretched forth his hands, vainly endeavoring to grasp something to stop his flight.

But the declivity seemed slippery as glass, his hands slipped over the solid rocks, not a handhold or foothold could he obtain.

In the movement his revolver slipped from his grasp, and he could hear it rattling away beneath him.

On, on he went; he could feel his breath de-

serting him, and a thousand twinkling stars seemed dancing before his eyes.

The few moments occupied in the break-neck flight seemed an eternity to him.

All the events of his past life passed before him like a hasty dream, until he felt the speed decreasing and found himself resting, face upward, gazing stupidly up at a shining mass of crystals that glittered above him.

As soon as he recovered sufficiently, he staggered to his feet, gasping for breath.

Shaking himself together, he strove to discover if he had been injured in the fall, but found that he had suffered no bodily harm except a tough shaking up, and considerable mental excitement.

Thanking Providence that he had not been killed outright, he gazed around, filled with the utmost wonder.

He found himself in a low cavern, from which depended on all sides numberless crystals, which glittered and scintillated like diamonds in the subdued light.

The effect was so surprisingly magnificent that it nearly took away his breath; he thought that he had never beheld such a splendid sight.

But what was he to do now? By the fall he had gotten further into the bowels of the earth than before, and it would be doubly difficult to extricate himself.

But standing there repining could not better matters; he must be working if he ever expected to get free.

Looking around to discover some outlet from the cavern, Little Bill found the revolver, lost during the hasty flight, resting at his feet.

"Ha, ha!" said he, chuckling to himself, as he picked it up, "thank fortune I haven't lost you, old chum; at least I have one more stand-by in my extremity."

He was turning about to examine further, when suddenly he again heard the sound of moccasined feet.

"By Jingo!" whispered he, "worse again and more of it; what new deviltry is this?"

Hastily hiding behind a friendly stalagmite, he waited patiently to see what would turn up.

Presently, amidst the dim light permeating the grotto, he saw some one approaching.

As the figure drew nearer he recognized it as an Indian, and looking closer, saw that it was Rolling Thunder.

The degraded and dejected warrior had taken no pains to cleanse himself from the marks of his recent terrific struggle.

His tattooed face and painted bosom was hideously disfigured by the drying blood that mingled with his war paint.

As he passed slowly on with measured tread and bowed head, singing his own death song, Little Bill had half a mind to address him.

But wisely remembering that the Apaches were on the war path, and therefore his sworn enemies, he held his tongue, permitting San-a-ga to pass silently by.

But as soon as he had done this a happy thought crossed our hero's brain.

The desperate savage would assuredly seek the open air to carry out his fell purpose, for should he die by his own hand in the mountain cavern the Great Spirit would be much longer in permitting his wandering spirit to reach the happy hunting grounds of his fathers.

Why not then follow him cautiously, and by this means gain his freedom?

Little Bill put the thought into instantaneous execution.

He pursued the disappearing savage at once, but taking excellent precaution to keep at a safe distance, well knowing the keen ear and shrewd perception of his Indian neighbors.

Some three-quarters of an hour passed in the trip to the open air, during which the way led from the crystal grotto into a dark passage in which not a particle of light was visible.

But warned by his recent flight through space our hero proceeded cautiously onward, feeling his way along the wall with his hands and feet, led by the pat, pat, pat of his leader's footsteps.

But gradually the darkness gave place to light, until finally Little Bill came to an opening in the rock, through which, with infinite joy, he could see the setting sun.

Uttering a sigh of satisfaction, he looked eagerly down from his perch into the leafy dell below.

Standing beneath a stout hickory sapling was the disgraced chief.

He was looking dejectedly up at the tree, but presently he turned and took a long glance at the setting sun.

Then turning again, he climbed an adjacent tree, and crawling out on a limb, adjusted his lariat to the top of the hickory sapling.

Then descending the tree, he pulled down the sapling to the ground.

It seemed a difficult task, for it took all his strength to complete it.

Fastening it to another tree with a portion of his lariat, the Indian severed the end with his knife, fastening it around his neck in a slip-noose.

Bill saw what he meant to do—he was about to hang himself.

But even had he been at his side it would have been too late to prevent him, for, as he completed the operation, the Indian severed the thongs.

With an elastic bound the sinuous hickory recoiled to its original position, carrying with it the body of the would-be suicide, writhing and struggling in the last throes of strangulation.

It was a sickening and ghastly sight, and Bill shuddered as he beheld it.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN AN AMBUSH.

LITTLE BUFFALO BILL paused, undecided what to do.

He could not bear to see the terrible struggles of the dying wretch.

Enemy though he now was, he had befriended him in the past, and the brave boy decided to save him, even at the risk of his own life.

In a moment he had unslung his trusty rifle, and bringing it to bear, fired.

The unerring bullet flew to the mark true as a die.

It cleft the stout lariat instantly, and the writhing suicide fell to the earth with a thud.

Then Little Bill leaped from his perch and ran to his side. Cutting the slip-noose with his knife, he fell to restoring the half-strangled Apache to consciousness.

The efforts were successful, and presently he came to, gazing stupidly upward into our hero's face with an amazed look.

It was evident that he knew him, for he gave him a nod of recognition.

"Why did you do this?" demanded he.

"San-a-ga desired to die!"

"But San-a-ga should not have taken his own life."

"Why not? It was useless to him, he has lost all and is disgraced in the eyes of his tribe; they would laugh at him, and call him a coward and a dog."

"But the Great Spirit would be angry with him; He would turn His face on him, never to look at him again."

"I have not been taught so."

"The black fathers would teach you so."

"They are good," replied the Apache, "but they are not braves."

"They are braves," said Bill, "they would risk their lives in time of danger, like their Great Chief, who died to save others."

"So?"

"Yes," answered Bill, "but why should San-a-ga wish to die like a coward when he can live and avenge himself on his great enemy?"

"How?"

The chief half arose, regarding our hero with his flashing eyes, as he asked the question.

"We-me-luck and Ne-meta are not wedded yet?"

"No, they will not be until the full of the new moon."

"There is plenty of time to avenge your wrongs during the interval."

"The young brave of the pale-faces talks fair, but he does not know all."

"The young brave knows more than you think he does. He saw you fight Bear Trail, and he knows that the Red Rose of the Prairies does not love him. He knows that he would fight to death any one who came between him and the girl he loves; and if Rolling Thunder's voice is not the bray of an ass, he will do the same!"

The recumbent chief uttered a savage growl as he leaped to his feet with glaring eyes, for he perfectly comprehended the covert taunt of his young companion.

"Now, none of that," said Bill, with a grim smile; "you are no match for me in your present helpless condition, even if you were armed, which I know you are not, otherwise you would not have attempted to hang yourself as you did. I have saved your life, and you better take my advice like a friend."

Rolling Thunder nodded his head as if in thought.

"What is the young hunter's advice?" he finally demanded.

"To come with me to Fort Franklin. I have friends there who'll back me in anything I say. We'll get a crowd of the boys, go down to the wigwams of old Two Bears, frighten the life out of him, and carry off Ne-meta, to become your wife. If Bear Trail attempts to put in a word, we'll put a darn sight bigger head on him than he's got to-night."

"Yes," muttered the Indian, undecidedly, "but what will the braves and the old men of my tribe say?"

"What's that to you?" replied Bill. "You're disgraced beyond redemption, as it is; and if the worst comes to the worst, I'll get the boys to raise a stake to settle you down on a farm East, where none of the red devils dare raise a hand against you; how is that for high?"

"Good!" said the crest-fallen brave, brightening up, "the young hunter is wise, and Rolling Thunder will follow his advice."

"Spoken like a hero," said Little Bill. "Let's shake and bind the bargain; if I go back on you, you may call me a skunk."

The two fast friends shook hands and started in the direction of the fort.

By this time the sun had disappeared behind the mountains, the shadows were lengthening, and it was quite dark when they entered the woods.

They had possibly proceeded a mile or more, when the Indian paused suddenly and held up his hand.

Little Bill came to a halt at once.

"What is it?" whispered he.

"We are pursued," replied the Apache.

"The deuce!"

"It is true."

"Then we must fight. Take this revolver and stand by me like a man."

"I will," replied Rolling Thunder, accepting the proffered weapon and clinching his teeth determinedly, "but it will be useless; come with me, I think I know a hiding-place where they cannot find us."

"Bully for you; you're a perfect brick!"

Rolling Thunder led the way off the path that they were pursuing into the bushes, through which they passed until they came out into an open clearing some quarter of a mile in extent.

This they crossed, and were entering the woods again when suddenly a guttural voice from the bushes, in the Apache tongue, commanded them to "halt!" as a dozen rifle barrels protruded into their faces.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

LITTLE BUFFALO BILL started back as he heard the command, and brought his rifle to bear.

But at the same moment he made a backward move, endeavoring to get out of range.

"Apaches!" whispered he to the Indian chief.

"No," replied Rolling Thunder.

"Don't attempt to retreat," continued the voice from the bushes; "put up your arms—it ain't so dark but what we can see you in here. If you surrender no harm shall come to you."

"Tain't Indians at all," whispered the chief; "that's white man's talk and white man's voice."

"In that case we'd better give in and surrender."

"Yes, they think we are both Apaches."

"All right!" responded Little Bill to the man in the bush, "I give in—I surrender."

"All right—come in."

Little Bill and his companion complied, going toward the bushes.

"Come this way and see what yer made of," said the questioner, leading the way further into the underbrush.

The captives followed, closely surrounded by the other hunters.

Presently they turned a huge boulder, coming into the glare of a camp-fire.

As they did so a startling shriek rent the air from a group of hunters gathered around

the fire, and in an instant Little Bill saw young Cato staggering back with his black face changed to an ashen shade, while the whites of his eyes magnified to their full extent.

"For de lub ub Heaben, Massa Bill," cried he, trembling violently, while his teeth chattered like a pair of castanets, "what has yer come back for? Can't de good Lord allow ye ter rest in peace?"

"What's the matter with you?" replied our hero, as Buffalo Bill darted forward, wringing his hand like a vise and hugging him like a bear; "what d'ye take me for?"

"Isn't yer de ghostie ub Massa Bill?" replied the bewildered boy.

"Nary a time!" answered Little Bill.

"I can swear to that, you woolly-headed runt. Come here and feel if I aint real, solid flesh, blood, bone and sinew. Glory be to halologerum!" said Buffalo Bill. "It does me good ter see ye alive and well; somehow or another, ever since I see you going rippin' and tearin' down that Black Pass as if you was going to kingdom come in a tornado, I couldn't get it out of my noddle that you was alive, although the rest of the boys allowed that you was swallowed body and bones by the wolves and vultures; so we've been looking high and low for ye ever since."

"Well, you'd had to a-gone under ground to have found me," replied Little Bill, laughing heartily at his friend, "for although I'm pretty tolerable, I came mighty nigh making a kick of it. My arm was broken, and I've been a prisoner ever since."

"The devil you have! Tell us all about it?"

Little Bill complied, giving a brief account of his own adventures while in captivity, which are already known to the reader, after which he introduced his Indian ally, telling the hunters about his wooing and defeat.

"By the living Jingo!" said Buffalo Bill, as soon as the recital was ended, "but you've had a tough time of it, copper-belly, and I pity you from the bottom of my heart, 'deed I do. I don't like none of your kidney 'mazen well, as you doubtless know, but seeing as you're an old friend of Little Bill, who has taken you in tow, I'll stand in with you, and don't you forget it. You shall have your Red Rose, red-nose, and there it is to bind the bargain."

Buffalo Bill extended his hand as he spoke to Rolling Thunder, who accepted the good will intended with the usual taciturn demeanor of an Apache brave.

"Yes," assented several of the bystanders, as they laughed at the grim humor of the daring scout, "and you can count us in, too."

"Couldn't have better fun," said Texas Jack. "I'd like to have a shy at Bear Trail myself."

"You shall," said Little Bill; "that is, if you come along with me to the stronghold of the Wizardess of the Black Pass."

"You will not find her there now."

All eyes turned towards the speaker, who was Rolling Thunder.

"Why so?" demanded Little Bill. "We left her there at the big feed following the espousal of Ne-meta and Bear Trail."

The Indian winced at the mention of the name of his successful rival, but hastily replied:

"I know it, but they have received news of your flight, and will quit the cavern as speedily as possible, for fear of being run to cover by any of your friends. Even now they are in pursuit of you."

"Yes, I remember you said that before we fell in with our friends."

"It is true, they are still coming—I can hear the sound of their footsteps now."

Every tongue was silenced, and every ear on the alert to hear the coming foe.

Presently a pit, patter, pit, was heard in the distance among the rustling leaves.

"Did not Rolling Thunder speak true?" demanded the Indian, proudly.

"Yes," said several of the hunters, almost beneath their breath.

"Say, boys," whispered Buffalo Bill, "the tarnal sneaking skunk thinks that Little Bill's alone, and expects to snap him up at once."

"No," said Rolling Thunder, shaking his head, "the king of the buffaloes is out for once. They know that the little scout has some one with him, but they do not know who it is. They would come faster were it not so."

"Likely enough you speak the truth," said

the scout, "but, howsomever, I mean to give 'em their belly full for keeping Little Bill captive so long, and then we'll drive 'em up, even into the witches' den itself."

"Better not try. They will be too many for you as you are. It would take double your party to attempt to attack them in the stronghold."

"Well, we'll give 'em a little shake up, anyway, boys; deploy skirmishers and give the red devils fits—"

Had not the foe been close upon them every hunter would have greeted the command with a cheer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE APACHE CAMP.

IN a moment every hunter in the group was at his post, rifle in hand.

But two paces remained between them, and thus all were within easy distance to hail or join each other if need required.

On came the foe, stealthy and cautious, but little anticipating the warm reception awaiting them but a few yards in advance.

Meanwhile the hunters had paused at the spot where Little Bill and the Apache had fallen into their hands.

Presently the Indians paused and were heard conversing together, as if undecided what to do.

"The red skunks are getting suspicious," whispered Buffalo Bill to his protegee, who was close beside him, acting as aide.

"I reckon they begin to smell a mice; they'll be backing out presently, see if they don't."

"In that case we better give it to 'em."

"Good!"

"Fire!"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

As the stentorian voice of Buffalo Bill rang sharply out in the night air, a long line of blazing forked tongues of fire illuminated the green foliage of the clearing, as the sharp crack of rifle followed rifle, and bullet after bullet found its home in the body of the red-skin foe.

The sudden and unexpected attack took the Indians completely by surprise, and for a few moments they seemed overwhelmed with alarm.

A few of them returned the shots, but with no effect, and presently they turned and fled utterly routed.

A vigorous cheer greeted their retreat, and then the hunters returned to camp and retired for the night.

Early the next morning Buffalo Bill and his young protegee were in the saddle bright and early, a horse having been furnished the latter for the purpose of going hunting.

"Look out for yourselves, boys!" said Texas Jack, as they rode away, "and look out the red skunks don't raise yer back hair!"

"Never fear, Jack," laughed Bill; "I've had mine soldered on for the occasion, and so has Little Bill. We'll be back in a couple of hours, and look out for yourself during the interval."

"All right!" replied Jack.

And then the two chums rode away, Jack watching them until they disappeared from sight.

For some quarter of an hour or more after quitting camp not a particle of game was to be seen, but then they fell in with a flock of wild turkeys, from which they bagged half a dozen, stringing them on their saddle bows, and rode on.

During the rest of the forenoon they managed to kill an antelope and a young fawn, from which they chose the choicest cuts, placing them beside the turkeys, and started to return to camp.

It was nearly noon when they turned their horses' heads westward, and they had not gone far when Buffalo Bill drew rein and motioned for Bill to do the same.

"What is the row?" asked our hero.

"Don't you see that smoke yonder?"

Little Bill looked in the direction indicated by Buffalo Bill, and saw a pale blue volume of smoke rising from a clump of pines some quarter of a mile distant.

"It's funny that I didn't see it before," said he; "what do you think it is?"

"An Indian camp, I reckon."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Find out how many there are of 'em, and go through, if possible, otherwise we'll have to take the back track."

"All right."

"Just you wait here until I reconnoiter," said the scout. "I won't be gone long."

Buffalo Bill leaped from his horse, consigning the reins to Little Bill, and crept cautiously into the bushes.

Some ten minutes passed before he returned again.

"It won't do," said he, "they're too many for us, there must be forty lodges of them, and they're just sitting down to dinner."

"Are they on the war-path?"

"I should say so from their paint and feathers."

"Well, we better give 'em a wide berth until we can get the boys together and shake 'em up."

"That's the talk," said the scout, remounting. "Now keep your eyes skinned, for if they see us there's bound to be a running fight, sure as you're born."

"All right, I'm with you. G'long!"

The last words were to the pony which Little Buffalo Bill was riding, which was an Indian pug, captured from San-ta-na and his band on the morning following the raid upon Col. Allison's ranch.

But unfortunately just as the word was given one of the Indian ponies in the neighboring camp set up a neigh, which was heard by Little Bill's pug; the vicious brute piped up in return, and seizing the bit in his teeth like a vise, made a dead set for camp at the height of his speed.

"Whoa! blame you," roared Little Bill, pulling and sawing away on the reins, but to no effect. "This is a pretty kettle of fish, Bill; what am I going to do about it?"

"Do!" retorted the scout, laughing, although his face looked grave, "why, go right through, and I'll stick to your back. Give the ugly cuss all the spur you've got, tickle him in the ribs with your toad-sticker, and make him go through, whether he wants to or not, it's our only chance. Can't you see the camp is already aroused?"

True enough, as Buffalo Bill spurred his trusty horse to our hero's side, half a dozen Indians appeared on horseback directly in front.

"Ride the red cusses down!" shouted the scout; "give them their belly full of lead, and use cold steel if necessary. Wagh!"

With a shout that rang out clear and shrill upon the prairie, a shout that could easily be heard a mile away, Buffalo Bill aimed his seven shooter at the nearest savage.

Crack!

Whiz!

Ping!

Down went the Apache with the life blood pouring from a bullet hole in the center of his forehead.

His frightened steed uttered a startled neigh and galloped away, dragging his dead master by the stirrups, his bleeding head bumping and jostling against the ground.

CHAPTER XXV.

CAPTURING THE BRIDE.

CRACK!

The smoke of Buffalo Bill's revolver had scarcely cleared away before Little Bill drew his rifle to his shoulder and fired in turn.

A yell of mortal agony followed the shot as another Apache went over the saddle bow, permitting his riderless horse to dash away in pursuit of its companion.

"Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!"

Shouted the two Bills in chorus, as they dashed swiftly through the ranks of the savages and bore down like an avalanche upon the camp.

By this time a scene of the wildest confusion was reigning amidst the lodges.

Squaws and papposes were running violently hither and thither, crying and shrieking at the top of their voices.

The old men gathered in groups, while the bucks, mounted in hot haste, riding down to the protection of their companions.

But neither Buffalo Bill nor his companion paid the slightest heed to the tumult around them. With reins in teeth and bending well down in the saddle to avoid numerous shots fired at them, they rode stoutly on with a revolver in either hand, returning shot for shot with dire and deadly effect.

On, on they rode directly through the center of the camp, whooping and shouting like born devils. Several of the Indians who were stampeded during the fight subsequently swore that fifty hunters had raided the

camp, and doubtless they believed this to be the case, for certainly the two scouts made sufficient noise to fully represent that number; but although they were beset by a powerful foe and showered with bullets, not one told home in a vulnerable part of man or beast.

The fray was nearly over, and the two scouts were just quitting the camp, when Little Bill drew rein, pointing suddenly to one of the lodges by which an Indian girl was standing.

The poor child seemed utterly beside herself with terror, and utterly incompetent to move.

"That's her," said Little Buffalo Bill.

"Who?" demanded his companion.

"Ne-meta, the Red Rose of the Prairies."

"The devil, you say; she's a perfect beauty."

"You bet."

"No wonder the two bucks had such a tough tussle of it; she's worth it."

"I wish that Rolling Thunder was here; he might have a chance to sneak her away."

"So he might. Wagh!"

The scout uttered a yell of delight as a bright thought seemed to strike him.

"By the everlasting jumping jimecracks," shouted he, "I'll do it, if it's to be did."

And turning his steed as quick as a wink, Buffalo Bill rode to the girl's side.

Then before she had the slightest idea of his intention he bent over the saddle bow, and inserting his arm around her waist, swept her quickly before him without scarcely interrupting the speed of his steed.

Whizz!

Scarcely had Buffalo Bill performed the wondrous feat before a tomahawk swept by his head like the wind.

"Hello!" gasped he, "that was a pesky close shave."

"Bill," riding to his comrade's side and slinging the shrieking captive before him, "look out for the gal; we'll take her in for Rolling Thunder; meanwhile I've got my hands full with this miserable skunk here."

Turning toward the Indian who had tossed the tomahawk, he presented his revolver full in his face, pulling the trigger.

But for once the scout's unerring weapon was at fault.

He had unfortunately forgotten to reload after the last shot, and the mistake came near to costing him his life.

Quick as a wink on seeing what had happened, Bear Trail, for Buffalo Bill's adversary was the victorious groom-elect, struck a ponderous blow at him with a heavy war club.

The terrible weapon came swinging through the air with a force that threatened instantaneous dissolution to the gallant scout.

Buffalo Bill realized his danger; with a strong arm he reined back his steed upon its haunches, until it stood nearly upright upon its hind legs, and the blow whizzed by with the velocity of the wind.

But again the ponderous weapon was brought to bear.

Up it went for another stroke.

But just as the blow was about to descend the powerful arm of the savage dropped nervelessly to his side with the tendons completely severed at the wrist by a bullet from Little Bill's revolver.

With a loud cry of rage and pain the wounded Indian dropped the useless club and sought his scalping knife, leaping wounded as he was to the rescue of his intended bride.

Meanwhile, Buffalo Bill had reloaded and turned to face some half a dozen of the Apaches who had come to their companion's aid.

Things were getting decidedly hot for the two scouts, their predicament was extremely perilous.

Crack! crack! crack!

"Ride for your life, Bill!" shouted the scout, as he blazed away right and left amidst the gathering crowd, guiding his horse meantime to our hero's side; "ride for your life and maybe we'll get away safe yet."

Bang!

Buffalo Bill delivered a crashing blow with the butt of his rifle upon the base of Bear Trail's skull.

The bones crunched with a sickening sound as the dazed savage fell upon his knees, and spurring forward, Buffalo Bill rode him down, trampling upon him like dirt beneath his horse's feet.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted he, "Get! If

we don't make a dash for camp now we are gone suckers, and no shennanigan about it."

"Ay, ay!" retorted Little Buffalo Bill, pressing the struggling Indian girl closely to his breast as he rode away, whispering something into her ear.

Up to this moment Ne-meta had been struggling violently, and doing her utmost to free herself from captivity.

She had not permitted her hands, or her teeth, either, to remain idle, as the bites on the arms and scratches on the face of Little Buffalo Bill plainly denoted; but as soon as he had time to whisper the few magical words in her ears, she ceased her struggles at once, remaining passively quiet in his arms.

"Thank you. The Great Spirit aid and guard you!" said she, looking up thankfully into his eyes.

And well she might, for he had told her that her lover was not dead, and that he was bearing her to him to make them one forever.

Crack!

Little Buffalo Bill turned his head as a bullet sang by his ear. Following the shot, and standing in the door of one of the lodges, he saw Lew Lopez, with his rifle loaded to fire again.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ESCAPE ON THE RAFT.

FOR a moment Little Buffalo Bill doubted the evidence of his own eyes.

He had seen Lew Lopez, the renegade, suspended in the pine grove dangling in the last throes of strangulation, and had no doubt of his death.

To be sure, he had seen his ghost in the cavern of the Black Pass just previous to the fall that so nearly cost him his life; but the sight of him there as he was, in broad daylight, in the attitude of firing at him as he had done while on buffalo back on the day of their first meeting at the target-shoot, was almost too much for human belief. It quite took away our hero's breath; he could not comprehend it at all.

Crack!

Another shot flew close to our hero's head. There was no doubt concerning this evidence, it was too point-blank to be contested, and Little Bill aimed his pistol to fire in return; but just as he did his pony swerved and turned dead around.

Crack!

Another bullet whizzed past, and as it did Buffalo Bill comprehended his comrade's danger, and at the same moment saw the renegade. In a second his rifle went up, and before the scamp could fire again a bullet crashed through his right arm close to his wrist.

Lopez uttered a savage volley of oaths as his arm dropped uselessly to his side.

Buffalo Bill put spurs to his horse, and overtaking the pug seized him by the bridle, wheeling him around by main strength.

"Keep his head straight, Bill," he said; "we've got the gal, an' twon't do to drop her. Leave the red cusses to me. Put straight ahead and I'll attend to them."

"All right, cap," replied our hero as he obeyed the order. "I'll do my level best."

Away they went, tearing swiftly over the prairie, Little Bill in advance, Buffalo Bill in the rear, exchanging shot for shot with the Apaches, who by this time were in hot pursuit. On, on they flew, until they reached a belt of timber that bordered a wide, deep stream that ran southward at a rapid speed. But just as they reached it a shot struck Little Bill's pony in a vital part, and the poor brute dropped in his tracks.

Down went steed and rider, the former never to rise again, but Bill landed on his feet, and leaping from the struggling pony with his charge in his arms placed her on the ground. "It's all up," he said; "we are done for."

Buffalo Bill gave a roar like a wild beast at bay.

"If it is," shouted he, "we can but sell our lives as dearly as possible, for it's certain death to fall into their hands."

"Oh, don't stop!" cried the Indian girl, wringing her hands in utter desperation. "I'd rather die than fall into their hands again."

"But what's to be did?" demanded the scout, loading and firing at will.

"Follow me!" shouted she, leaping into the bushes.

The two scouts followed at once.

Some forty yards further on they reached the river.

"What yer going to do?" demanded Buffalo Bill.

"Secure the canoes," replied Ne-meta, pointing to where some dozen or more were fastened to the trees upon the bank, "and I'll show you."

Little Bill complied as Buffalo Bill leaped from his horse.

"See," continued Ne-meta, "here is a large raft; it is the only one they have to cross the stream, and the current is too swift to swim their horses; if we can get it from the bank and secure the canoes, we can escape."

"Bully for you, little gal!" ejaculated the scout, "you're a trump card—we'll win the game."

The two hunters fell vigorously to work, and the Indian girl rendered great assistance.

Presently the ungainly object was shoved into the rushing stream, and jumping on board, accompanied by Buffalo Bill's horse, the canoes were attached, and away they went swiftly down the rapid river just as the Apaches' advance guard hove in sight.

An enraged roar greeted the movement, as the Indians poured a perfect shower of arrows and bullets after the fugitives, who fell upon the raft, indulging in wild shouts of derisive laughter.

Meanwhile the foiled savages turned inland, taking a detour around the timber land, where they commenced firing anew; the hunters returning the shots from the raft, where they had managed to make a breastwork with some bags of grain and bundles of buffalo skins, which afforded them a safe cover.

Meantime the stream ran too fast for the Indians to keep up with the raft, and finally they gave up the chase as a bad job and returned to camp.

"By the everlastin' jim-cracks, little gal," said Buffalo Bill, as soon as the firing ceased, wringing Ne-meta's hand until she winced, "but you are a perfect beauty. Blamed if I don't envy San-a-ga, 'deed I do; he ought ter be proud of you and no mistake."

"So he had," replied Little Bill, "but how that black-muzzled skunk, Lopez, came to be alive, is what stumps me."

"Wagh!" ejaculated Buffalo Bill; "the devil always looks out for his own until he wants 'em home. I suppose some of his imps saved him for future use; but I reckon I put a stop to his devilment for some time at least. I smashed his right flipper clean as a whistle, blame his ugly skin!"

"Oh," said the Indian girl, looking thankfully at her companions, "how can I ever pay you for what you've done for me to-day?"

"Pray don't mention it!"

"Call it quits," responded the two Bills, almost in a breath.

"But I never shall forget it," replied she; "indeed I never can."

Buffalo Bill turned away to avoid her thanks.

"We must be somewhere near the round curve in the Red-deer Pass," said he.

"Yes," replied Ne-meta, pointing eagerly down stream; "it is just around yonder headland."

"Then we shall be in the rapids in less than two minutes?"

"Yes."

"The deuce! I must be looking to the old tug, or we shall be all dashed to pieces on the black rock."

As he darted to the rear of the raft, and seized one of the shove-poles, bidding Little Bill to take another, a sound resembling the roar of a cataract was heard just ahead.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SAVED FROM THE RIVER.

As the sound reached his ears, the great scout's face grew visibly pale.

"Is there danger ahead?" demanded Little Bill, anxiously.

"Yes, if we don't look well to our raft and shove-poles we'll all be dead as salt mackerel in less than five minutes."

"You don't say?"

"I just do; cut those bloody canoes adrift, or they will foul us; then take station at the rear of the raft, keep her well mid-stream, and don't let up on her for your life."

"Ay, ay!"

"I'll look to the head."

"You better let me guide you," said Ne-meta, softly, as she crept to Buffalo Bill's side.

"Wagh!" said he, smiling at her. "What can a girl like you do? Let us men alone, and hold fast to the horse, in case we strike bed-rock, for we'll have to swim for it as sure as you're there."

Ne-meta's lip curved with a slight sneer as she turned away, but she made no reply.

By this time they were rounding the point with the rapids in full view, boiling and seething like a maelstrom.

"Steady!" shouted Buffalo Bill, as the prow of the raft struck the current with a swiftening speed.

"Steady it is," retorted his young companion from the stern of the raft, which was swinging round at a rate which threatened to swing him into the bubbling water every instant.

Away they went at a frantic speed into the shallow water that scarcely covered the sunken rocks a foot.

Here and there a ragged point reared up amidst the boiling, surging caldron that surrounded it, as if to warn the voyagers of their extreme peril.

Now and then the raft would strike a sunken rock with a thud, that caused it to shiver and shake as if it were going to pieces, and as it did the men, even the horse staggered beneath the violence of the shock.

But neither budged an inch as they stood manfully at their posts, awaiting the greater danger to come.

Fiercer and fiercer boiled the water as it dashed and danced around the ill-fated raft, which was bowling along at the rate of ten miles an hour.

Shock after shock came, and every concussion was more violent than the former one.

"Now!" shouted Buffalo Bill, through his set teeth.

The next instant the raft struck, and for a moment rested rigidly motionless.

So sudden and unexpected was the shock that Little Bill was tossed clean over his shove-pole upon his face, while Buffalo Bill went over into the surging eddies head first.

Even the horse staggered and uttered a frightened cry.

But Ne-meta held stout hold upon the bridle, crouching down and encouraging him with her voice.

Little Bill sprang to his feet, bleeding at the nose, but realizing that it was all up with the raft, hastened to the bow where Buffalo Bill was coming up from the bubbling water, puffing and blowing like a grampus.

"Look to yourself, boy," gasped the scout, "the raft is going to pieces! Look to the gal!"

"Never mind me," retorted Ne-meta, leaping up and letting go the horse's bridle, "I can swim, and have no fear; look to yourselves."

The next moment she turned the frightened horse's head toward the shore, giving him a sharp stroke on his buttocks with her hand.

With a shrill whinny the animal leaped overboard, and commenced swimming and clambering over the rocks for the shore.

Then came a ripping, tearing sound, a fierce upheaval of the timbers of the raft, and then it broke in the center, going to pieces like an eggshell.

It was a moment of extreme peril to all.

Ne-meta had leaped into the waters as the raft broke up, and was swimming with long strokes in the wake of the horse.

Not so with Little Bill; poor fellow, he had become entangled amidst the debris of the raft, which bumped and jostled violently against him, threatening instant death.

But realizing our hero's perilous position, Buffalo Bill struggled to his side and disengaged him from a monster log just as it was submerging him against the jagged edge of black rock.

For an instant the gasping swimmers held stout hold of the ragged top amidst the surging waves as the shattered raft ranged swiftly by, and then they struck out again.

"We're in for it!" sputtered the scout, spurting a volume of water from his mouth and nostrils.

"Well, then, we'd better get out!" replied Little Bill, forcing a laugh.

Then something struck against them.

Turning, they saw that it was a canoe, but it was bottom up.

Both seized it at once. It seemed a perfect Godsend, and they clung to it for dear life.

For a brief interval it bore them up as they

were swept rapidly onward, and then it struck with a violent concussion against a sunken rock and went to pieces like the raft.

The last hope seemed gone, as the two swimmers grew faint and weak from the violence of the struggle.

"Courage!"

The words came to them from the shore in a shrill voice.

Looking thence, they saw a strange, fantastically-dressed woman, standing on a shelving rock.

By her side was Buffalo Bill's horse, shivering and dripping with water, while the woman was stooping down to draw Ne-me-ta from the river.

Having done so, the woman uncoiled the lariat from the saddle-bow, and tossed it toward the half-drowned hunters, who grasped it in frantic haste.

Then the two women grasped the horse's bridle, leading him up the rock at a gallop.

The lariat tautened; the drowning men could feel it move, and holding stoutly on, they were dragged on shore.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PROPHECY OF NE-ME-TA.

WITH feelings of unutterable emotion, the two scouts sank upon their knees, rendering silent homage to Heaven for their miraculous deliverance.

Then rising, they turned toward the strange woman who had furnished them such timely aid.

"By ginger, Bill," whispered our hero to the scout, "if it ain't the witch of Black Cavern herself."

"So," replied Buffalo Bill. "I've often heard tell of her, but never saw her before; I believe they call her Ne-me-ta, the White Medicine of the Black Apaches, or the Wizardess of the Black Pass."

"I always thought she was white," observed Little Bill; "she spoke such pure English, but she wouldn't admit it."

"Not she; she's too sharp for that, but we must thank her all the same, for she's saved our lives."

"Sure," answered Little Bill, "but Ne-me-ta had a hand in, too, for it was through her means that the horse reached shore."

Buffalo Bill nodded.

"Certain, sure," said he; "she allowed just now that she didn't know how to pay us for what we'd done for her, but she's gone one better on us and raked the pile."

Then they went up and thanked the two women for their timely aid.

"You are welcome," responded the wizard-woman, bowing her head, "it was the will of the Great Spirit; I am simply his handmaiden in the act."

Then she turned suddenly toward Little Buffalo Bill, regarding him sternly with her black, piercing eyes.

"Why did you quit my dwelling so suddenly and uncivilly?" she demanded, sharply.

The boy was abashed at the sudden inquiry, and made no reply.

"Had I done you injury, or been unkind?" she demanded again.

"No."

"Then you should have abided my time," she replied, thoughtfully; "it would have been much better for you had you done so."

Buffalo Bill looked at them both with deep amazement; he could not comprehend what it all meant, while his companion stood as silent as before.

"You should not have departed as you did," said the mysterious woman; "it was a hazardous step, and might have cost you your life!"

For a moment she remained silent, gazing up at the blue heavens with a distant light in her eyes, and then she spoke again.

"But perhaps it was better," she muttered, as if communicating with herself; "but I had much to tell him, and he should have remained to listen; now he must wait."

Little Buffalo Bill was as deeply perplexed as his namesake, but somehow the manner of the strange being forbade him putting the question direct.

Presently Ne-me-ta spoke again.

"You would go hence to join your comrades?" she asked.

"Shoo!" ejaculated Buffalo Bill, "you've hit the nail on the head."

"I know more than you give credit for," she said, with a wan smile, "and I will aid you. The Great Spirit has appeared to me in

a vision, and I must obey his bidding. You would take Ne-me-ta to the object of her choice?"

"Exactly!" responded Buffalo Bill, nodding; "I couldn't have put it better myself."

The wizardess smiled again and patted Ne-me-ta playfully upon the cheek.

"What says my daughter in the matter?" she inquired, regarding her with her piercing gaze.

Ne-me-ta's eyes low, red and the tawny color of her cheeks heightened to a flush.

"The White Medicine of the Apaches has spoken," she replied.

Ne-me-ta nodded and pointed to an opening in the rock.

"Follow me," she said, "and I will put you on your way. You must then shift for yourselves."

"We will, bet your life!" responded Buffalo Bill.

Ne-me-ta led the way through the pass till they came to a grove of pines, where several horses were picketed.

"Choose for yourselves," said the wizardess, "for you have far to go. Meantime I will prepare food, for you must be weary and hungry."

Ne-me-ta left them as she spoke, and the two hunters fell to harnessing a couple of the horses.

"Hadn't you better take a fresh horse, Bill?" asked our hero.

"Nary a time," responded the scout, shaking his head; "old White Hoof's been through too many hot places with me in the past to leave him in the lurch now; and after what's happened to-day I'd rather lose my right hand than to leave him behind."

It seemed as if the horse comprehended every word, for he came to his master's side and, poking his head over his shoulder, pressed his nostrils against his cheek, uttering a low whinny.

Buffalo Bill turned and caressed the faithful animal's neck with his hand, and again the horse manifested his delight by a neigh.

By this time Ne-me-ta had returned with some cooked provisions, to which the fugitives did ample justice.

When they had finished eating Ne-me-ta informed them that it was time to start, and they mounted at once.

"You will take this path," said Ne-me-ta, pointing to an opening in the grove; "pursue it until you reach the prairie; the Great Spirit be with you!"

"The same to you, with many thanks," replied Buffalo Bill; "and if ever you need a friend, call on Bill Cody, and he'll stick to you while there's a drop of blood left in his veins."

"I shan't forget your promise," replied the strange woman, "and shall call on you if need requires."

Then turning to Little Bill, she said:

"We too shall meet again, for you have much to learn that you should have learned before."

A strange, wild light beamed in her eyes as she continued:

"I see trouble, great trouble in store for you, my son, danger and foes; but the Great Spirit is good and works mysteriously and silently—He will carry you through."

Waving her hand she wheeled about, and as they rode away they could see her disappearing amidst the foliage of the grove.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN AMBUSH IN THE GRASS.

As the wizardess disappeared the two hunters rode swiftly away in company with Ne-me-ta.

"It was a lucky snap for us, Bill," said Buffalo Bill, "that we snapped up the Indian beauty just as we did."

"Why so?" inquired our hero.

"You ain't no fresh in these parts, pard," replied the scout, laughing pleasantly, "but you'll find if you ring in with me that I ain't no slouch on keeping my eyes skinned. Can't you see that the old gal is sweet on the Red Rose of the Prairies?"

"Admitting the fact, what does it amount to?" asked Little Bill.

"Well," answered Cody, taking a nip at his navy plug with a vicious snap, as he plunged the rowels of his spurs into his horse's flanks to increase its speed, "you'd a found that out if it hadn't been for Ne-me-ta; wouldn't he, Prairie Rose?"

The Indian girl laughed a rippling laugh in reply.

"Perhaps, so be," she said, "but if the white hunters do not increase their speed they may be out in the woods yet."

"Why?" demanded Buffalo Bill.

"The Apache are no fools," replied Ne-me-ta. "If we have escaped them once we may not again; there are birds in the air that carry news swifter than the horses' hoofs that tread the prairie."

"Right again, little one," responded Buffalo Bill, casting a hasty glance around. "I had forgotten that; we ain't out of the woods yet—go long!"

"The White Chief of the Buffaloes had better be cautious," whispered the girl. "They are coming now, but Ne-me-ta will not give away a friend. Listen!"

The three drew rein instantly, and the tramping of horses' hoofs was heard approaching from the distance.

"The Red Rose is right," said Buffalo Bill; "we must look out or we will be snapped up."

Making a motion to his companions, Buffalo Bill dismounted at once to examine the ground.

"They are coming, dead sure," said he, laying his head to the ground and rising up hurriedly. "There is no time to lose, but there have been many horses here lately, and they will not observe our trail if we are careful. Come!"

Snapping the blankets from the horses' backs, he spread them out upon the ground, affording a safe and secure footing for them to travel on.

"To the bushes, and hide till they have passed, and we may manage to circumnavigate them yet."

In a moment Little Bill and Ne-me-ta dismounted and led their steeds across the blankets toward the heavy underbrush that grew close at hand, and as they went on, Buffalo Bill picked up blanket after blanket, tossing them over his shoulder until he had reached the hiding-place where his companions were hidden.

The movement was accomplished none too soon, for scarcely had they lain down before an Apache searching-party rode swiftly by, led by Lew Lopez in person, with his wounded arm bandaged closely to his side.

"Rat that born devil!" hissed Buffalo Bill through his set teeth. "I thought that I had settled him for good and all, but it seems as if his cussed master don't want him, or he's got more lives than a Kilkenny cat in full fighting trim. There they go. Wait a bit, and then we'll be getting ourselves."

A few moments passed, and as soon as the scout considered "that the coast was clear, with clear sailing-room," as he termed it, he gave the word to mount, and away they went taking a deer-track for the great prairie beyond.

"Bully boy!" shouted our hero; "we are rid of the pesky red skunks at last."

"Don't you be too sure of that, pard," replied his companion.

"Listen!" hissed Ne-me-ta; "they have learned our flight!"

As if to prove her words they could hear the clatter, clatter, clatter of horses' hoofs in hot pursuit.

"Now you're shouting!" ejaculated Buffalo Bill; "ride for your lives, for the devil is after us and no mistake. How are your cartridges, Bill?"

"Dry as a bone," laughed Little Bill; "I use shells, and water can't penetrate them no how."

Just then they emerged from the woods upon the verge of the prairie.

By this time it was near dark, and the shadows of the pine trees fell far out upon the waving grass.

"By mighty!" said Buffalo Bill, suddenly smiting his hand sharply upon his thigh; "but we can give 'em a dose yet, and get away safe and sound into the bargain."

"What do you mean?" asked Little Bill.

"I'll show you in a minute."

He rode a little way out into the tall waving prairie grass, and gave the order to dismount.

When it was done he made the horses lie down, which concealed them all completely from view.

"How's this for an ambush?" asked Cody; "they won't suspect it, not much; they'll be lookin' for us out on the prairie when they quit the woods, and be right on top of us be-

fore they know it; and then won't we pepper them pretty; oh, no!"

The idea tickled him so much that he fairly punched himself in the ribs, and then held his sides with his hands to keep from laughing out loud.

On came the pursuers.

They were well mounted, and had not the slightest doubt of capturing the fugitives, for there was no river near for them to play such a ruse as that so recently practiced by the trio.

Presently the Apaches hove in sight through the openings of the woods, some twenty or thirty of them all told.

They were led by Lew Lopez, who was encouraging them to their utmost speed.

How little they anticipated what was to occur, until Buffalo Bill gave the word:

"Fire!"

Twenty-four shots resulted in as many seconds, and at least a dozen saddles were emptied of their riders.

CHAPTER XXX.

SAFE IN CAMP.

So startling was the sudden fusillade from the prairie grass that the Apaches were completely put out.

Twelve of their number were dead or dying, and Lopez himself had simply escaped scathless by the wounding of his horse, which fell to the earth, carrying him along.

"Furies!" roared the outlaw with an oath, "why don't you go forward? There are only three of them!"

He started to obtain one of the wounded chiefs' horses, but a bullet came so close to his head that he ducked down again.

Again came the deadly storm of bullets before the two scouts had reloaded.

This was too much; the defeated savages could stand it no longer, and turning tail they sought a place of safety under cover of the woods.

Lopez swore and roared like a madman, but to no earthly effect, and as his allies disappeared, he, too, ran to the rear with his body nearly bent double to avoid the shower of lead that flew so thickly around.

"Hurrah, huzza!" shouted Buffalo Bill, "the victory's ours; now mount and away; lay low in your saddles, for they'll fire on us, but we've beat 'em clean out!"

In a moment the horses were up, with their riders bending closely along their backs, as they sped away like the wind.

Crack! crack! crack!

Whiz!

Ping!

Report followed report in rapid succession from the verge of the woods, and the leaden messengers of death whistled closely by the flying fugitives, singing unpleasant music in their ears.

But both scouts well knew that a whistling bullet never hits, as it has already passed when you hear the hiss; consequently they simply plied the spurs to increase their horses' speed until they were out of danger, which took them precisely ten minutes.

"Glory be to hallelugerum!" shouted the scout, "we're safe out of that. What next, I wonder? What the dickens will the boys think's come to us, say?"

"Well," replied Little Bill, "I reckon they'll think we've been gobbled up."

"You bet; but, let's see, which is the best way to strike out for camp? I'm somewhat circumnavigated by the round trip I've had to-day."

"It's a wonder our heads ain't turned completely. I never see the beat of it."

Buffalo Bill laughed and looked up at the sky, which was now flickering with stars.

"There's the dipper," said he, "and the north star; our path lies yonder to the east."

And turning their horses' heads in that direction, they made straight for camp.

It was nearly nine o'clock when they reached the pickets, and a joyful shout greeted their appearance, for all hands were getting extremely uneasy concerning their long delay.

But possibly there was not a happier man in camp than Rolling Thunder when he was presented to his future bride.

Stoic though he was, tears came into his eyes as he embraced her, and then turning, knelt at Buffalo Bill's side, clasping his knees with his arms.

"Come now, none of that," said the scout, lifting the Apache to his feet; "I don't want

no living being to lick the dust off my feet, not even if he is an Ingin. I simply done what I thought was right, and my heart is glad I done it. You've got the gal; keep her and be good to her after you're spliced, she's worthy of it. You'll get harnessed by the chaplin of the fort certain, and we'll have a real jollification too, for neither of you dare go back to the tribe now, for you're tabooed, and 'twould be sure death. There, no more nonsense about it; you two get and arrange matters privately in your own way, for we must move for Fort Franklin the first thing in the morning."

Loud cheers greeted the scout's address as the Indian lovers strolled away arm in arm, and then the two Bills were summoned to the supper that had been awaiting them for the last three hours.

"By the everlasting jimcracks," said Buffalo Bill, as he set his teeth into a juicy antelope-steak which had been taken from his saddle-bow by one of the hunters, "but we were pesky lucky, taking it all in all, to-day!"

"Yes," replied Little Bill, "lucky in keeping our scalps on, and reaching camp alive; but I'm sorry I lost my horse, for I was beginning to be attached to the little beggar."

"Yes, and it's too bad that you lost your game," said Buffalo Bill, referring to the turkeys and antelope haunch that were on the Indian pug's back.

"Well, luck favored you!" replied Little Bill, dryly.

"Why so?"

"You have got the stakes."

"Bah!" snarled Buffalo Bill, acknowledging the sell. "I won't speak to you for a week; that's the worst out."

By this time having finished supper, and being completely fagged out from the day's fatigue, the two scouts wrapped themselves up in their army blankets and lay down to rest.

For a time Little Bill lay gazing up at the twinkling stars, but finally his eyes closed and he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LITTLE BUFFALO BILL'S SECOND DREAM.

For a time Little Buffalo Bill's slumber was peaceful and unbroken, but toward dawn he tossed restlessly upon his hard bed, and another vision presented itself.

Again he saw the swarthy features of the child stealer of his former dream.

But this time the scene was widely different.

It was in the interior of a log hut upon the verge of a prairie that the wretch appeared.

He was seated near a fire in the wide fireplace, over which a camp-kettle was boiling.

Presently a knock sounded upon the door.

"Come in," said the man, turning his head in that direction.

The door opened, and a man wrapped in a cloak, with his slouched hat drawn closely down over his eyes, entered, leading a lady closely veiled.

"So you have come?" asked the dark-featured owner of the hut.

"Yes."

"I have done your bidding"

"Good!"

"It is here."

"So is your money."

A look of cupidity flashed in the child stealer's eyes as he arose and went to the shake-down bed in the corner.

"Here it is," said he, "as snug as a bug in a rug."

Removing the upper blanket, he revealed the features of a slumbering infant scarcely sixteen months old.

It was the one stolen from the distracted mother in the previous dream.

"Oh, you poor innocent," whispered the veiled woman, "my whole heart yearns for you, you poor, motherless little darling!"

A furtive glance passed between the two men as the woman took up the slumbering child, and pressed it tenderly to her bosom.

"I believe that this is all," said the man in the cloak, handing a bag, which emitted the chink of gold, to his confederate.

"All," responded the other, consigning the bag to his pocket, "but do you not wish to know more concerning the other one?"

"No," said the former, sternly, "she was false to me, and must abide the consequences."

"She squealed hard when I snaked the

kid," said the desperado, with a fiendish chuckle.

The man in the cloak dignified no reply as he turned toward his female companion.

"Come," said he, "we must delay no longer; it is getting late, and we have a long journey before us."

The woman nodded, and wrapped the infant in the folds of her cloak, following her companion from the room.

"Curse you, you infernal aristocrat!" hissed the kidnapper, as soon as they were gone. "You think that because I have done your bidding, and you have paid me, that you can spurn me like the dust beneath your feet; that we are quits, but we shall see—we shall see!"

A misty cloud seemed to veil the scene, and Little Buffalo Bill awoke with a start.

The bracing breeze of the morning had chilled him thoroughly, and he shivered visibly as he sprang to his feet.

As he did so he found old Cato facing him. "You has had anuder vision, Massa Bill," said the old negro, wagging his head from side to side. "I knowed it by de way you shook aroun' in yer sleep."

"Yes, Cato," said Little Bill, curtly.

"What was it like, honey? Tell de ole man, an' maybe he can help yer out."

Little Buffalo Bill complied with his request.

The old man's eyes snapped as Bill finished speaking.

"It's mighty precarious," said he, shaking his head thoughtfully, "an' I can't clean make it out."

"Neither can I; I'm all mixed up."

"Perhaps it concerns Miss Lucy," said Cato, after a brief pause.

"Likely enough; maybe it was her I saw in both dreams."

"Her or her spook."

"Nonsense; spooks don't walk till one is dead!"

"Don't yer believe it; de soul quits de body when we're aleep same as't does when we are dead and wanders about, but it can't return when we are dead, 'cause it hain't got nobody to return to above de ground!"

Little Bill shuddered at the old man's strange doctrine, but he could not controvert the theory.

"Maybe you're right, Cato," said he; "I've had some strange wanderings in my dreams that I could not account for, and seen places that I never saw while awake."

"Yum, yum, honey," replied the old man, "dat proves dat what I just said is right. Dey may call me an old fool for sayin' what I thinks, but dey can't contrumvert me, all de same!"

Little Bill nodded.

"That may all be, Cato," said he, "but we must leave it to the future to expound the mystery."

"Certain sure, de good Lord will make it all right in His own time."

"Well, we'll leave all that to Him," replied Little Bill, "but in the meantime we must strive to find out all we can concerning the past history of Miss Lucy and her father."

"Certain!" replied Cato, and then the conference ended, for several of the hunters were waking up, and they did not wish to be overheard.

One hour later breakfast was over, and all hands started for the fort.

It was a lovely morning; the sun was verging the eastern horizon, shedding a roseate light upon the prairie, and as they rode onward every hunter's heart beat buoyantly in his bosom.

"This is what I call life," said Buffalo Bill, inhaling a long draught of the fresh morning air. "I feel as fresh as a daisy or a clover blossom. Glory! this is freedom! No one can deny a poor fellow the right of God's breath or sunshine when He sees fit to give them to us."

Just then a loud shout greeted them from a grove of pines some yards in advance, and the next moment a dozen mounted regulars from the fort hove in sight, headed by a lieutenant.

As they drew nearer and exchanged salutes the officer rode forward.

"Major Jackson, the commandant has sent me in search of you," he said. "His orders are that you return to the fort at once."

"We were going there," answered Buffalo Bill.

"That's right. There will be hot work to-morrow," replied the lieutenant. "The

Apaches are out in full force, and a regiment will be sent to quell the disturbance at once." A loud cheer greeted the announcement.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FOILED AND CAPTURED.

"THAT sounds like business, lieutenant," said Buffalo Bill, waving his hat around his head as the cheers of the hunters rent the air. "This fighting a score of Injuns with a corporal's guard ain't what it's cracked up to be, notwithstanding the honor attached; if the boys stick together we'll fetch the blood-thirsty varmints to their rations, and no mistake."

And with these remarks, which were greeted with another cheer, the party wheeled about and rode to the fort.

The same afternoon Ne-me-ta and Rolling Thunder were made one by the post chaplain, and after a purse had been made up for their benefit by the troops and their friends, departed by the mail-coach for the far East.

The night was far advanced before the jollification following the wedding ended, but at dawn the troops were in line ready for action, and departed under command of the colonel of the post.

Buffalo Bill, Little Bill, Texas Jack, and California Jeth were appointed scouts, and accordingly took the lead.

They were perfectly acquainted with all the roads and passes in the neighborhood, and thoroughly conversant with the *modus operandi* of Indian warfare.

It was nearly noon, however, before they came in sight of the enemy, and then only small scouting parties were to be seen.

But presently a larger party, some twenty-four in number, were discovered.

"Now's our chance," said Buffalo Bill; "if we can only circumnavigate this crowd we'll manage to learn something concerning the varmints' intentions. Remain here and I'll go out and reconiter."

"No," said Little Buffalo Bill, "give me a show; I'm the youngest of the lot, and if anything should happen would be the least missed."

"I admire your pluck, Bill," replied Cody, "but it ain't to be did; I'm better posted in this line, and my honor is at stake."

"So is mine," retorted our hero, "and I have more honors to win."

"That's a fact," observed Texas Jack; "give the lad a show."

Old Jeth laughed.

"Wall," said he, "the kid's right, and so is Jack."

"In that case I suppose I must fall in," said Buffalo Bill; "let's draw lots and see who comes out first best."

"I'm agreeable," said our hero.

"Well," put in Texas Jack, "if that's the game count me in."

"Me too," said California Jeth.

"All right," replied Buffalo Bill, "we'll all try our hands."

He sprang from his horse as he spoke, and pulled up a handful of prairie grass. Then turning his back upon his comrades he arranged four blades between his fingers.

"Now," said he, facing about and covering the blades with his hat, "the one who gets the shortest is elected."

"All right," retorted the others, in a breath.

One after another they drew a blade of grass.

"Blazes!" shouted Buffalo Bill; "I'm out!" He held up the longest blade.

"I'm in," retorted Little Bill, with a laugh. He held up the shortest cut.

Buffalo Bill shrugged his shoulders.

"That's so," said he; "but think of Lucy."

"That ain't fair," said Little Bill; "I wouldn't have believed it of you."

Buffalo Bill's face dropped.

"Forgive me," said he, "I didn't mean it, indeed I didn't."

"I believe you," replied Little Buffalo Bill, wringing Cody's hand. "Just you wait here, and if I can't make anything out I'll draw them in, and we'll snap 'em all up."

"Just the ticket," said Texas Jack; "you're top of the heap."

And then shaking hands, all round Little Buffalo Bill rode out to the edge of the grove in which they were hidden.

After pausing a few moments he took a detour to the right, where the woodlands ranged out on the prairie.

But up to this point he had been able to

discover nothing further than he already knew—that there were twenty-four of the Apaches, all told.

"I reckon that I'll try their mettle," whispered he, "and see what they are made of."

He had scarcely uttered the words before he heard a low ejaculation at his side.

"Hist!"

Turning suddenly, he saw a figure rise slowly up from the underbrush.

It was Ne-me-ta, the medicine woman.

"Hush!" whispered she. "Do not speak; you are beset with danger. I cannot stop to explain more, or I shall endanger myself. Return to your comrades, and save yourself!"

"How do you know that I have comrades?" he asked.

"I know everything," answered the strange being. "I am in direct communication with the Great Spirit himself. But use all speed, before it be too late!"

Laying her fingers warningly upon her lips, she disappeared amidst the underbrush.

For a moment Little Bill remained undecided what to do; then, heedless of the friendly warning, he rode boldly out upon the open prairie.

The Apaches saw him, and at once greeted his appearance with a shout.

The next moment a shower of bullets rattled around him.

Little Bill rode swiftly on as he discharged his rifle, following it up with his revolvers. Several saddles were emptied, but another shower of bullets followed as Little Bill turned his horse toward the ambush.

Away he went, the leaden messengers of death flying closely around.

In another moment he would reach his companions.

But just as he thought all secure, that his friends would effect the capture of a number of the enemy, he heard a whizzing noise at his side, followed by a sickening sense of strangulation, and then his senses utterly deserted him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SHOT FOR LIFE.

MEANWHILE Buffalo Bill and his fellow scouts remained hidden in the underbrush that bordered the prairie, awaiting the return of their young comrade. Half an hour passed, and they began to get uneasy at his protracted absence. They could not imagine what delayed him so long.

"He ought to be back now," said Texas Jack, uneasily; "those redskins mean mischief or they wouldn't delay so long yonder; they are holding a pow-wow."

"I'm sorry I let him go at all," replied Buffalo Bill; "I hope no harm will come to the youngster."

"Leave him alone for that," replied Jeth, priming his jowl with a fresh quid of navy plug; "he's sharp as a beaver, and like enough he's got 'em dead to rights now. Hello!"

The last exclamation was made as Little Buffalo Bill rode out upon the prairie from the clump of pines where he had received the warning from Ne-me-ta.

The whole prairie was plainly visible from the ambush of the scouts.

"Dod rot the boy, he'll be killed!" hissed Buffalo Bill; "is he gone mad?"

"Nary a time," replied Texas Jack, "he's only feeling 'em, drawing 'em in so that we can get a shot at 'em."

"Bully for him!" ejaculated Bill and Jeth, unitedly.

Meantime, as Little Bill appeared, the scouts witnessed the fusillade of bullets that greeted him.

But suddenly he wheeled, firing as he did so, and rode directly for them.

"By the everlasting, that was well done," said Buffalo Bill; "go it!"

On came Little Bill, riding well down in his saddle to skip the bullets that flew around him like hail.

He was close upon them, and the scouts were eagerly watching his flight, when suddenly they saw a lariat hurled around his neck, and then he was whirled from his horse, disappearing amidst the tall prairie grass.

The three scouts gave vent to shouts of dismay, and poured a volley into the approaching savages from their rifles and revolvers.

"This will never do," said Cody; "one of you ride back and tell Col. Jackson to send a company up at once; we must rescue Little

Bill, or he's a gone coon; he's fallen into the red devils' hands!"

"I'll go," said California Jeth. "I shan't be long."

"Don't," replied the two scouts in a breath, as the old man rode away.

Meantime, as soon as Little Buffalo Bill fell to the earth, nearly strangled to death by the lariat, two Apaches grasped him by the head and feet, dragging him swiftly away through the tall prairie grass.

Half an hour passed, and gradually he recovered consciousness.

As he sat up, he found some twenty Indian braves gathered around.

Several of them had been chafing and manipulating his limbs to bring him to.

"Good," said a gruff voice, close beside him; "he's come round all right. I was afraid that he was done for."

Looking up, with his head still throbbing from the close contact of the lariat, Little Buffalo Bill saw Lew Lopez, the renegade, scowling malevolently at him.

"So I've got you at last," said the outlaw, with a fiendish chuckle.

"So it seems," replied Little Bill, dryly.

Lopez nodded, displaying his teeth wolfishly.

"Do you know what I am going to do with you?" he asked.

"No."

"You tried to hang me once?"

"Yes; and I am sorry that I wasn't successful."

"I ain't, for now I can return the compliment with double interest."

"All right."

Lopez stamped his feet with rage at the calm imperturbability of his victim.

"Curse you!" roared he, fairly frothing at the mouth with venomous rage; "I'm going to fasten you to a stake and torture you to death."

"You want to try my mettle, I suppose," said Little Bill, with a sneer. "Well, I've stood fire before, and I guess I can again; you'll find me steel to the back-bone."

"Put him to the stake," roared the infuriated brute; "we'll make him sing another tune presently."

Several of the braves seized Little Buffalo Bill by the arms, and dragging him from the earth, fastened him with deerskin thongs to the stump of a tree.

"How many were with you just now?" demanded the outlaw, as the Indians finished the operation.

From the question Little Bill realized that the renegade knew nothing of the contemplated raid of the regulars. He might gain time, possibly save his life, if he could delay the preparations for torture.

"What would you give to know?" demanded he, assuming a crafty look.

The renegade was taken off his guard.

"What is it worth?" he asked.

"Considerable to you," replied Little Bill, "and considerable to me. Spare my life, and I'll tell you all."

"It's a go, but you must remain a close prisoner for the present," said Lopez.

"I'm agreed."

"Tell me the number first?"

"Only one!"

"Honor bright?"

"Honest Injun!"

"Who was he?"

"Buffalo Bill!"

"I'd give my head to have him where I have you!" hissed Lopez, savagely.

"You can."

"How?"

"Go back to where I was lassoed, and you'll find him just twenty yards in the brush."

Just then an Indian scout rode hurriedly into camp.

"The troops are on us," shouted he; "there is a whole regiment of regulars within half a mile of the camp."

"Fiends and furies!" roared Lopez; "we are betrayed. Quick, to the outposts, and defend your wigwams, squaws and papooses. Leave this lying dog to me!"

In a moment the whole camp was filled with tumultuous excitement, squaws were running hither and thither in search of their children, while the young men hastened to the outposts.

"So you have lied to me," said Lopez, turning upon our hero after giving the orders to

the Indians; "what is to hinder me from killing you?"

"This!" hissed Little Buffalo Bill, presenting the muzzle of a revolver to the renegade's breast.

Crack!

Lopez pressed his left hand over his chest with a spasmodic motion, took two turns around, and fell prostrate to the earth.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

NE-ME-TA'S LAST REVELATION.

As Little Buffalo Bill discharged the shot his bonds dropped from his limbs, and he sprang forward, planting his foot upon the body of the prostrate man.

At the same moment Ne-me-ta stepped suddenly from the bushes behind him.

"That was nobly done," said Little Buffalo Bill, turning thankfully toward the mysterious being. "How can I ever repay you?"

"I was in hopes that I might save you," she replied; "but when the news of the advance of the troops came I knew that it was too late. There was no time to lose, so, as he turned to give the command for defense, I cut your bonds and placed the revolver in your hand."

"And just in time, you noble woman."

"I have much to tell you," replied she, interrupting him. "Come with me and leave this carrion to the crows."

Crack!

The sharp report of a pistol beneath their feet interrupted further speech, as Ne-me-ta staggered against Little Bill, grasping his arm for support.

Looking down, he saw Lopez endeavoring to recock his revolver for another shot.

With a kick he sent the weapon flying from the outlaw's hand, planting his boot upon his arm.

"I meant it for you!" hissed the renegade, through his clenched teeth, "but she'll do as well, curse her for a meddling hag! She saved your life."

"Are you hurt?" demanded Little Bill, supporting the woman, who was leaning heavily upon his shoulder.

"Yes," replied Ne-me-ta, moaning, "mortally. I have scarce ten minutes to live. I can feel myself bleeding internally. Listen while I have time to speak. Twenty-four years ago I was married to Col. Allison in St. Louis. At that time he was one of the wealthiest and most respected merchants of that city. For six years nothing occurred to mar the happiness of our existence; but at that time I discovered that my husband was false to me and sought redress through the courts. He brought in a counter charge, accusing me of infidelity in turn, which was false, for never was there a truer wife to man than I to him. Through the intervention of

friends the suits were adjusted and a separation followed. For a time I lived alone, until a daughter was born.

"About this time I learned that my husband had another wife living in the far West, which explained his frequent absence from home, which he had accounted for on the ground of business. The thought nearly drove me frantic, but I strove to console myself by closer attention to my child—but even this frail consolation was denied me, for one night I awoke to find a wretch in my room stealing the child from my side. I fought desperately to prevent the outrage, but he struck me to earth, and when I recovered I was the inmate of an asylum for the insane. After my recovery I used every effort to discover the whereabouts of my little one, but to no effect; money and influence seemed to avail nothing, and, weary and broken-hearted, I determined to seek the Western abode of the colonel in hopes of finding through him, the whereabouts of my lost darling. I succeeded in obtaining an interview, but he utterly denied all knowledge of her whereabouts, which I still believe to be false; but determined to watch his every movement, I contrived to ingratiate myself into the favor of the Black Apaches, by whom, through my skill as a nurse, I soon became considered a great medicine woman and prophetess—"

Here the dying woman was interrupted in her narrative by an internal hemorrhage.

"But the colonel had a daughter?" inquired our hero, eagerly, as soon as she had partially recovered.

"Yes," replied Ne-me-ta, faintly, "and I believed her to be my child, notwithstanding his denial, but I had no further proof than the instincts of a mother's heart. What could I do? I had no rights, for when he married me he had another wife living. Disgraced as I was, I dared not return to those among whom I had been formerly respected, consequently I remained as you have known me, a lone woman amidst the savages of the prairies, in whom I found true and simple friendship in my adversity."

As Ne-me-ta ceased speaking Little Buffalo Bill chanced to glance down at the dying renegade at his feet.

There was something in the man's eyes that caused him to gaze earnestly at him.

The look explained all, the meaning of the two visions was instantly revealed to him, for in Lew Lopez he recognized the child stealer of his first dream, and the outlaw who had given the slumbering infant to the veiled woman in the second.

"Speak!" said Little Buffalo Bill, kneeling down and shouting the words in the ears of the dying man. "Speak before you are called before the Judgment Seat to answer for your many crimes! Speak the truth and re-

lieve the heart of your murdered victim! Did you not steal her child and give it to Col. Allison?"

The glazing eyes of the dying man lit up with a strange, unearthly light as they turned toward Ne-me-ta.

"Yes," whispered he, "Lucy Allison is her daughter."

The death-rattle sounded in the wretch's throat as he made the confession, and a stream of blood poured from his lips.

"God forgive and save you for that!" murmured Ne-me-ta, clasping her hands over her bleeding bosom. "God forgive you as I do!"

Little Buffalo Bill felt her weight increasing on his arm, and looking into her face, saw that she was dead.

At the same instant a volley of musketry announced that the engagement between the Apaches and the U. S. Infantry had commenced.

* * * * *

But a few words will complete our eventful history.

After a brief but bloody battle the Black Apaches were overpowered and sent, under guard, to the reservation, where they still remain close prisoners for fear of another outbreak.

Col. Allison has erected a new and commodious residence on his ranch, where his daughter Lucy does the honors as mistress. It is needless to say that she never heard the sad story of her mother's wrongs from her young admirer.

But Little Buffalo Bill had a long interview with the colonel, at which it was decided to keep the matter silent, and the unfortunate woman was quietly buried in Col. Allison's private plot upon the ranch.

Old Cato and little Cato are still great heroes among the negroes of the neighborhood, who never tire of listening to the oft-told story of their vicissitudes among the Apaches.

Rolling Thunder and his bride are dwelling at Carlisle, Pa., where a family are growing up around them.

Texas Jack, Buffalo Bill and California Jeth were frequent visitors at the Allison ranch while acting as government scouts, but since the two former came East the duty has fallen upon Jeth and Little Bill, who is the only acknowledged prototype of his great namesake.

Old Randolph Martine and his daughter Abbie are frequent guests, and when the writer paid his last visit to the Rio Del Norte, he found the fair mistress of Allison Ranch actively engaged in preparing for her nuptials with Little Buffalo Bill.

[THE END.]

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